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# ACADEMY'S SECOND SEAT

– 아카데미 차석이 되었다 –

## - VOLUME 6 -

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[ RAEI TRANSLATIONS ]

# CHAPTER 253
# ROBERT (1)

Robert looked at Rudy.

The moment for decision had come.

“You’re not a kid, what’s with the whining?”

Robert patted Rudy’s head.

‘I believe in this guy.’

Robert didn’t want to make Rudy like himself.

Or perhaps, it was for his own sake.

To avoid any more regrets, Robert had come here.

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Robert was an orphan.

He barely survived after being abandoned in the capital.

To avoid starving, he begged; to survive, he clung to adults.

Fortunately, being abandoned in the capital was a blessing in disguise.

Near the capital was Ephomos.

It overflowed with orphans like him, and there were people willing to take care of them.

Though “taking care of” might sound kind, in reality, these people exploited the orphans.

They made them pickpocket to line their own pockets, providing the orphans with just enough bread to live on.

While living day by day through pickpocketing, he encountered magic.

Necromancy.

It was a magic that orphans in Ephomos could easily come across.

The very people who made the orphans pickpocket were necromancers.

They used the money the orphans made from pickpocketing for their research.

Every day, as Robert pickpocketed and contributed to them, he learned magic by watching from the corner of his eye.

He learned the basics of magic this way and practiced it.

Though young enough to survive through pickpocketing, he thought that learning necromancy was essential for surviving the future.

He lived by pickpocketing in the morning and learning magic in the evening.

During such a life.

“What are you doing?”

“Excuse me?”

“My wallet. Give it back.”

He encountered Levian, a middle-aged man.

“Ugh… Wind Blaster!”

Robert used magic to try and escape from Levian.

“Oh…”

Levian was impressed that a child who was pickpocketing could use magic properly.

“What do you do?”

“I’m a wizard.”

“…What?”

Despite trying to escape with magic, Robert couldn’t get away from Levian, who was an accomplished wizard at the time.

Levian smiled and approached Robert.

“How about learning magic from me?”

Levian saw potential in Robert.

It was unthinkable that a child living off the streets and pickpocketing could have learned proper magic on his own.

Yet, since Robert had used magic, Levian believed that with proper instruction, he could become an even greater wizard.

Thus, Levian took Robert back to the capital, kept him nearby, and observed him for several days.

Confirming his initial judgment was correct, Levian made an offer to Robert.

“You should enter the academy.”

“…The academy?”

“If you go there, you’ll be able to learn a lot. About magic, about being human, and even what it means to have friends.”

With a smile, Robert responded.

“I refuse.”

Robert was aware of the academy.

He knew it was a place for nobles, where attending cost a fortune.

He'd rather save that money to live on his own.

"Haha, such a bold one. But,"

Levian said with a broad smile to Robert.

"Did I give you a choice?"

Robert was then captured by Levian's magic and sent to the academy.

Tied up with ropes, he was loaded onto a carriage and sent to the academy with just a letter.

"Mmph!"

"…What's this?"

"A letter from Levian."

[Turn this one into a proper person. Professor McDowell.]

"Huh…"

Robert was thus left in the care of Professor McDowell at the time.

Given Levian was a royal wizard, Professor McDowell couldn't possibly refuse his request.

"What's your name?"

Professor McDowell asked as he untied Robert.

"…Puhah! Who are you?"

"McDowell. Call me Professor McDowell."

"Professor? Anyway, send me back to the capital. If there's any money Levian paid, please return it."

"Money?"

“This academy’s expensive, isn’t it? So, Levian must have paid for my tuition. Please give that money back.”

“There’s no such thing.”

“What?”

“If there’s no money, I can’t attend, can I?”

“Why ask me? I wouldn’t know.”

Levian had not given any money to Robert.

If he had provided tuition fees, Robert could have taken the money and run away or come back with it.

To prevent this, Levian didn’t support any tuition or fees.

Professor McDowell, understanding the situation somewhat, said,

“That doesn’t mean there’s no way.”

“There’s a way?”

“The academy has a very good scholarship system. There’s an entrance exam the day after tomorrow. Score well on it, and you won’t need to pay anything.”

“…I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“If I get the money, can I run away?”

“…Haha.”

After some thought, Professor McDowell spoke,

“Alright. If you top the exams, I’ll give you the money. But if you score anything less, you’re staying at the academy.”

“Top the exams…”

Robert thus took the entrance exam for the academy.

His goal was the money.

He planned to top the academy, receive the scholarship, and then run away.

Robert was confident he could top the exams.

After all, the academy was filled with nothing but noble brats.

He couldn’t possibly lose to them, having learned magic the hard way.

However, that was a misconception.

[

Charles Cromwell 2. Robert 3. Elena 4. George Mcguire

…

]

“What?”

Robert secured second place.

He scored higher than anyone in practical magic, but his weakness in theory placed him second.

1Charles Cromwell 2. Robert 3. Elena 4. George Mcguire

So, it was impossible for him to secure the first place.

“Huh…”

McDowell thought his heart would sink.

Especially since Robert, expected to rank low, had managed to secure second place.

“Did you say McDowell?”

“Call me Professor McDowell.”

“Whatever the title. I have a question.”

“Uh-huh?”

“That Cromwell bastard. Who the hell is he?”

That was the first encounter between Robert and Cromwell.

The first defeat Robert felt.

Whether noble or commoner, he simply beat them in magic skill.

Robert had thought himself the best in magic among his peers.

After all, his abilities were recognized by Levian, a royal wizard.

Yet, he couldn’t believe he had lost.

“…What the f*ck are you doing?”

“I should be asking you. Who are you? Coming out of nowhere, swearing at me.”

Robert went straight to Cromwell to pick a fight.

Then, a woman intervened between the two.

“Don’t fight, you two!”

“…And who is this?”

“I’m Elena… But, regardless, you two should get along! Stop fighting!”

She was Elena, a commoner like himself who had proudly secured third place.

Robert looked at Elena curiously.

After looking at Elena, Robert turned back to Cromwell and shouted.

“Just so you know, first place is mine.”

“Ha! Struggle all you want. You won’t be taking first place from me.”

And so, their rivalry began.

Both of them strove hard to secure first place, improving their skills significantly in the process.

Because of this fight, Robert never thought about returning to the capital again.

He was solely focused on studying to defeat Cromwell.

“The valedictorian spot is mine…”

“That’s bullsh*t. I’ve been first more times than you, how could that be possible?”

“What?”

“You two, again! It’s graduation day, why are you fighting!”

Their rivalry continued until the day of graduation, becoming a well-known spectacle within the academy.

Robert and Cromwell fought, and Elena intervened.

It had become such a routine event that even the professors no longer paid it much mind.

“Elena, just leave them. It’s not like it’s their first day fighting.”

Mcguire, always present, enjoyed watching their quarrels.

These four were always seen together.

The four of them, competing and growing together, were the focus of everyone’s attention.

“So, Robert, what will you do after graduation?”

“After graduation? Probably head towards becoming a royal wizard. Levian is there, after all.”

“And Cromwell? Professorship?”

“Yeah, there’s still a lot I want to research at the academy.”

“What about you, Elena?”

“Me…? Hmm… What to do…”

“Elena, how about heading towards being a royal wizard? It’s actually the best place for a wizard without a family name.”

“Is, is that so? What about you, Mcguire? Where will you go?”

“I’m probably heading towards a professorship. I’ve always wanted to be a professor since the old days.”

As he said this, the corners of Elena’s mouth twitched upwards.

“Well, guess I have no choice then!”

“…What do you mean, no choice?”

“I have to take care of Robert! If I don’t, he’ll just keep getting into fights with others!”

Robert looked at Elena bewilderedly.

“I’m not some brawler. Don’t take it so lightly, think about it seriously.”

“I was being serious!”

“Elena, you’ve got your work cut out for you.”

“Tell me about it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Amid their conversation, a loud announcement was made.

“Now, we will announce the valedictorian of the 12th class of Liberion Academy. The valedictorian is… Charles Cromwell. And the salutatorian is Robert. There will be an award for the two of you. Please come forward.”

“…Are you kidding me?”

“A fair and wise ranking, indeed.”

Robert and Cromwell said simultaneously.

Then, Robert bristled.

“In our third year, my grades were…”

Just as they were about to fight, Mcguire pushed them from behind.

“Go on, both of you. Are you going to keep fighting even on graduation day?”

“Ugh…”

Grumbling, Robert and Cromwell went forward.

“Robert…”

Elena looked at Robert’s back with pity.

“Elena, you don’t need to worry so much.”

“Huh?”

“This is actually better for him.”

Mcguire said with a smile to Elena.

“Because Cromwell took the top spot, Robert will become stronger. He’ll become an even better wizard.”

“Really?”

“Just keep watching. By Robert’s side.”

Elena and Mcguire watched as Robert and Cromwell walked forward.

“Don’t get complacent just because you did a bit better in school. I’ll soon surpass you as a wizard.”

“We’ll see about that.”

Thus, they bickered back and forth, finishing the graduation ceremony.

Cromwell and Mcguire stayed at the academy, while Robert and Elena headed to the empire’s capital.

Becoming royal wizards was quite easy for Robert and Elena with their skills.

Robert was the salutatorian of the academy, and Elena had consistently ranked third.

They supported each other, honing their skills, and both became outstanding wizards.

“Robert, you’re getting on in age. Aren’t you thinking about marriage?”

“What kind of bullsh*t is that?”

“Hey, even as a royal wizard, should you be using such vulgar language?”

“What does it matter how I speak?”

Robert continued his magic research under Levian as planned.

They got along well, bickering just like when they first met.

“I’d like to see my grandchildren someday, Robert.”

“Then ask your own son.”

“You know I don’t have a son.”

“Why are you telling me to get married then? I’m too busy studying magic.”

“You have a partner, don’t you?”

“…Partner?”

“Elena is there, isn’t she?”

“…?”

As they were talking, Elena burst into the room.

“Robert!! Let’s have dinner together tonight! I’ve finished my work!”

Elena looked back and forth between the two puzzledly.

“…Is there something going on?”

“No, nothing special…”

“Elena. What do you think about Robert?”

As Levian asked with a pleased smile, Elena tilted her head in confusion.

“Like a good friend… we’ve spent a lot of time together…”

“No, I mean as a partner.”

“What??????”

Elena’s face turned crimson red.

“Partner? Partner? As in the partner I’m thinking of… Suddenly?”

“I really dislike beating around the bush.”

As Levian said this, Elena fidgeted with her fingers.

“That’s… I don’t hate the idea…”

“Really?”

Hearing this, Levian pushed Robert’s back.

“You two planned to have dinner, right? Off you go then.”

“…What? I still have work to do. My research isn’t—”

“That can wait. You can ask others for help.”

“As if there’s a dark wizard among the royal wizards…”

Then, a black hand emerged from Levian’s shadow, lifting Robert and Elena out the door.

“Old man!”

“Go enjoy your meal.”

Levian smiled, watching them leave, and then closed the door to his study.

Robert looked at the closed door with a bewildered expression.

“Ro, Robert… What should we do…?”

“Let’s just go have dinner for now.”

And so, they got up and left the Magic Tower.

Levian watched them leave the Tower from his study.

“Good times…”

Levian smiled contentedly.

# CHAPTER 254
# ROBERT (2)

After that incident, love blossomed between the two.

Thus, they got married, and Elena was soon carrying the fruit of their love.

However, their happiness was short-lived.

“Elena…”

Robert took Elena’s small hand in his.

Elena’s hand, once warm, was now growing cold.

“Robert… I’m sorry. I… I…”

“No, don’t say it. You don’t have to…”

Suddenly, the door burst open!

Levian rushed in.

“What’s happening here? The healing magic isn’t working.”

“Le… Levian.”

“I don’t understand. After giving birth, magic doesn’t affect Elena. It’s like pouring water into a bottomless pot…”

“Move.”

Levian pushed aside the healer and manipulated mana.

“Lord Levian… Do you not understand what’s happening here…”

Elena spoke, gasping for breath.

Levian shook his head.

“No, that can’t be it.”

This wasn’t something that only happened to mothers.

It was a phenomenon seen in those gravely injured or dying.

Despite pouring in healing magic, the mana would drain away, indicating the person’s self-healing capabilities were depleted.

Even with healing magic, it essentially aided the person, not directly saving them.

Without self-healing, pouring in healing magic was meaningless.

“Elena, just hold on a little longer. I…”

“No… I know both of you did your best.”

“Elena!!”

With the last of her strength, Elena grasped the hands of Levian and Robert.

“Please take care of our child…”

“Elena… Elena…”

“Please… Robert. Promise me.”

“Oh, no. Elena, I…”

Elena’s grip weakened.

Robert’s eyes widened as he cried.

He couldn’t even give her a proper response.

He only cried as she passed, unable to answer her.

That's how Robert had to let Elena go.

---

"Robert, are you feeling any better now?"

"What can I do? Elena is gone. All I have left is Richard. I have to get up for his sake."

Though the pain in his heart and the memories with Elena lingered, time cruelly moved on.

Robert couldn't stay in his sorrow forever.

He had his son, Richard, and had to live on for him.

Robert tried to act as if nothing was wrong, letting time pass.

It was then that Levian approached him.

"Robert. Why don't you take a break?"

"Huh?"

"I'll look after Richard for a bit. You go clear your head."

"With him…?"

Turning to where Levian pointed, there was Cromwell.

"It's been a while, Robert."

"Ah…"

"Take a short trip with Cromwell to the academy, see the world a bit. It'll help you clear your head."

After much thought, Robert nodded.

"I'll be back in a week. Please take care of Richard during this time. I'll write a letter to the nanny in case you're busy…"

“Don’t worry about that. I wouldn’t just leave a child I consider like my own grandson.”

“Thank you.”

Robert said his goodbyes and left with Cromwell.

They didn’t speak as they boarded the carriage.

The carriage headed towards the academy.

During the ride, neither of them spoke; only silence filled the air.

“I was a terrible husband.”

Robert broke the silence first.

“…”

“I couldn’t even respond to Elena’s last words, just cried. I should have said something, anything, as a proper farewell… I…”

Thump!

Cromwell slapped Robert’s back as he vented.

“Such responses don’t matter. What matters is that you do as Elena wished, as she wanted.”

“…”

“You’re a father now. Not a student of the academy, not a royal wizard, but a father. Is that how a father behaves?”

Cromwell said this and opened the window.

Outside, the academy’s lights were visible.

“Still, it’s okay to be sad for now. For a moment, you don’t have to be a father, just my dear friend.”

"…"

Robert quietly nodded at Cromwell's words.

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"Leaving already? Why not stay a bit longer?"

At Mcguire's words, Robert smiled.

"I'm worried about my son."

"Next time, bring your son along for a visit."

Cromwell said to Robert as he was about to leave.

Just then, a man approached them.

"What are you all doing here?"

He was dressed in very luxurious clothes.

Robert narrowed his eyes at the man.

"Who are you?"

"Ah, my apologies for the late introduction. I'm Ophillius."

"Ophillius?"

Cromwell nudged Robert.

"Jason Ophillius. The Chancellor of the Empire."

"…The Chancellor?"

Robert's eyes widened.

"I've heard a lot about you. Robert, wasn't it? Famous as Levian's disciple."

“Thank you. My name is Robert.”

Robert extended his hand to Ophillius.

Cromwell looked at Ophillius shaking hands and asked.

“Are you heading back now?”

“Yes, I’ve finished my discussions with McDowell. Are you also returning to the capital?”

“Ah, yes.”

Ophillius said with a friendly smile to Robert.

“Then let’s go together. It’ll be boring alone. I’ll provide the carriage.”

Robert found himself in a slightly awkward situation.

Still, hearing that the Chancellor of the Empire was well-acquainted with Levian and was reputed to be a good person, Robert put aside his doubts.

Since there was no carriage available, it seemed best to accept Ophillius’s offer to share his.

“Alright, let’s go together.”

With Robert’s acceptance, Ophillius smiled.

“Then, have a good trip.”

“See you later.”

Robert bid farewell to Cromwell and boarded the carriage with Ophillius.

“Shall we head to the capital then?”

“Yes, to the capital…”

“No, wait.”

Ophillius interrupted Robert's agreement to head to the capital.

"Let's go to Ephomos instead."

The coachman, upon hearing this, made a subtle expression but nodded.

"Ephomos, you say?… Alright."

Robert was puzzled by Ophillius's decision.

Before Robert could ask, Ophillius explained.

"I have some business to attend to in Ephomos. I'll get off there, and you can continue on to the capital."

Robert considered this for a moment.

He realized he hadn't been to Ephomos since he was a child.

"No, I'll also stop by Ephomos."

"In Ephomos? Do you have some business there?"

"Not exactly…"

"Hmm… Alright. It doesn't matter to me."

And so, the carriage drove on.

"Nothing's changed here."

They arrived in Ephomos.

"I'll go and attend to my business then. Beware of pickpockets here."

"Sure, go ahead."

Robert watched Ophillius leave and then looked around.

From the place he stayed…

“This is where I met Levian.”

…to the place where he had met Levian.

Robert remembered the time he had stolen Levian’s wallet.

The thought made him laugh.

Stealing the wallet of someone who was a royal wizard of all people.

It was a ridiculous situation.

As he aimlessly observed Ephomos,

Thump!

Someone hit Robert’s pocket and ran.

He looked at the person who bumped into him with disbelief.

It was a scruffy-looking child.

“The technique hasn’t changed, has it?”

Robert smiled and chased after the child.

“Aaaaah! Please, spare me!!!”

“I won’t kill you. Just make you wish I had.”

Robert chased the child and raided their hideout.

Ephomos hadn’t changed.

Necromancers were gathering children and teaching them to pickpocket.

“Tsk…”

Robert clicked his tongue and looked down at the necromancer at his feet.

“I’ll give you anything you want, just please…”

“What could you possibly offer me? You’re just scum, aren’t you?”

“No, no! If you look at this data…”

The necromancer pointed towards a desk.

Robert looked at the documents laid out there.

“…Resurrection magic?”

“Yes! We can resurrect people with necromancy! According to our research…”

The necromancer mumbled something, but Robert wasn’t listening.

At the mention of resurrection magic, Elena’s face came to Robert’s mind.

“Can it be used right away?”

“What?”

“Can you use it right now?”

“We can’t right away… because we lack the skills… Just give us some time.”

“Hmm…”

Robert, after intently looking at the documents, lifted his foot off the necromancer.

“Th-thank you…”

“Pack up all those documents.”

“What?”

“Hand over all the documents. I’ll look into them.”

“You’re going to research…”

“Don’t like that idea?”

“No, not at all!”

The necromancer quickly got up and stuffed all his documents into a bag.

Robert took the bag of magical documents and stood up.

“I’m leaving. Make sure to improve by the time I return. And know that if I come back and find you treating those kids like this, you’re dead.”

“Understood!”

With the documents in hand, Robert returned to his home in the capital.

“Dada!”

“Wow, do you already recognize your father?”

Upon returning home, Robert found Levian holding Richard.

Robert immediately took Richard into his arms.

“Your mood seems better.”

“Yes, seeing a friend and the world has improved my spirits.”

“That’s good.”

Levian smiled and moved to leave.

“Are you going? Stay for dinner…”

“No, you and your son need time together. I should be going.”

As Levian was about to leave, something caught his eye.

“What’s in that bag?”

Robert, who had left empty-handed, now had a bag with him.

“Oh, just a souvenir. I went to the academy after a long time…”

“A souvenir?”

Levian narrowed his eyes.

He looked at Robert suspiciously.

Robert slightly turned his head, avoiding Levian’s gaze.

“Alright then. I’ll be off.”

“Yes, go ahead.”

Levian felt something was off but decided there was no need to pry into something Robert wanted to keep hidden.

# CHAPTER 255
# ROBERT (3)

“Dad!!! Look at this!!”

“Hmm?”

“I can use magic!!!”

“You can?”

Years passed like that.

Richard grew up fast, and he was already over 10 years old.

“Look! Fireball!”

Then, flames appeared in Richard’s hand.

Robert’s eyes widened.

It was rare for a 10-year-old to use magic.

Moreover, Robert had never taught Richard any magic.

“How did you learn magic?”

“I learned from a book on Dad’s desk!”

“Desk?”

Magic learned on his own.

Robert remembered his own childhood.

He too had learned magic on his own.

Seeing that Robert didn't say anything, Richard's expression soured.

He had touched Dad's desk without permission.

"That… touching Dad's desk was…"

Just as Richard was about to apologize to Robert,

"Richard, you're a genius!"

Robert smiled brightly and ruffled Richard's hair.

Richard beamed at Robert's praise.

"Yeah! I'm a genius!"

"But still, you shouldn't touch Dad's desk carelessly. There are many dangerous things."

"Okay! I understand!"

With that, Robert stood up.

It was time for Richard to go to bed.

Richard lay in bed, covered himself with a blanket, and spoke.

"Dad, when I grow up, I want to be your apprentice."

"Apprentice?"

"Yeah! I want to be a wizard like you."

"I don't think that's a very good idea…"

The magic Robert used was dark magic.

The perception of dark magic wasn't very good among the public.

Even though Levian did a lot to change that perception, it couldn't change overnight.

“I’m going to be a wizard like Dad!”

“……Let’s talk about that later.”

For now, Robert dodged the topic.

‘He’s still young. Hopefully, he’ll change his mind later.’

“Now go to sleep.”

“Okay, Dad, sleep well too.”

Robert then put Richard to sleep and walked down to the basement of the mansion.

“It’s almost finished.”

Research on resurrection magic.

The research was nearing completion.

In fact, the research on the magic itself was finished, but there was a lack of mana to be infused.

“How much mana stone is needed…”

No matter how expensive the mana stone inserted, the magic did not activate.

The magic just greedily consumed the mana stones without any change.

“……Sigh.”

Robert sighed and continued with his research.

The next day.

Thump—

Robert, dozing off, banged his head on the desk.

Seeing Robert’s state, Levian looked worried.

“Robert, you seem to be in bad shape these days.”

“Ah……”

It was no wonder he wasn’t well, researching necromancy at night and working as a royal wizard during the day.

Levian kept an eye on Robert.

“Robert, come outside for a moment.”

“Understood.”

Levian stepped outside with Robert and lit a cigarette.

Robert then took a cigarette out of his pocket as well.

“Didn’t you tell Richard you quit smoking?”

“How can I quit overnight?”

“It’s a promise you made to your son, isn’t it?”

“That’s why I don’t smoke in front of him.”

“I see… Anyway, what have you been up to these days?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been hearing things. You’ve been visiting Ephomos more frequently.”

Upon hearing this, Robert’s expression hardened.

“Robert, I know what you’re doing.”

Levian said this and sighed.

“I know you miss Elena deeply. But you shouldn’t resort to necromancy. Think about why the empire has banned necromancy. It’s not magic that creates miracles; it defies the natural order.”

“I understand.”

“I believe you’ll make the right decision.”

Levian said this and went back into the Tower alone.

Robert watched Levian’s back and muttered quietly,

“I’m sorry, Master.”

He bowed his head in the direction Levian had gone.

Robert extinguished his cigarette and went inside the Tower.

“Are you on leave?”

“Yeah, I’m going to take a short break.”

“Uh… um…”

“I have plenty of leave left. Just use that.”

“Understood… But, shouldn’t you at least inform Lord Levian…”

“It’s fine. I’ll handle it.”

“Understood.”

With that, Robert headed to Ephomos.

“I’ve almost finished my research. But why isn’t it working? It should work according to the theory.”

“You know why, Lord Robert. It’s because there’s not enough mana.”

“Not enough mana? I’m using the highest quality mana stones.”

“Can a human life be equivalent to a mana stone?”

“So, what should I do?”

The necromancer stroked his chin and stood up.

“Alright… I’ll give you our treasure. It’s because you’ve helped with the research.”

“Treasure?”

The necromancer then opened a safe in the laboratory.

“This is the mana stone.”

A mana stone filled with tremendous mana.

It contained more mana than the highest quality mana stone.

“Where did this come from?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

Robert stared intently at the necromancer.

“Even if you look at me like that, I can’t tell you. I would die!”

“Alright, I won’t ask if you’re giving it to me.”

Robert accepted the mana stone from the necromancer.

“Then I’ll come back later.”

“Yes, please be careful.”

Robert returned to his mansion with the mana stone given by the necromancer.

“Dad?”

Richard’s eyes widened when he saw Robert.

It wasn’t the usual time for Robert to return.

Richard, puzzled but happy, exclaimed,

“Dad! What’s happening? At this time…”

Robert smiled,

“Richard, Dad took some time off.”

“Really? So you’ll play with me?”

Robert hesitated for a moment, fidgeting with the mana stone in his pocket.

However, he pushed aside his concerns,

“Yes, let’s enjoy today to the fullest!”

“Really!”

“Yes, what shall we play?”

Robert began to play wholeheartedly with Richard.

They played until sunset, and as it turned to evening, Richard’s eyes began to droop.

“Richard, should we go to bed now?”

“Mm… I want to play more with Dad…”

“Dad took a longer leave, so we have tomorrow too. Let’s play again tomorrow.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

With that, Richard dashed into his bedroom.

Peeking out from the door, Richard said,

“Then I’ll go to bed early and play with Dad from tomorrow morning.”

Robert laughed,

“Alright, let’s play to our heart’s content from tomorrow morning.”

“Okay! Goodnight, Dad.”

Watching Richard enter the bedroom, Robert smiled but then his expression turned serious.

He sighed deeply, reaching into his pocket to look at the mana stone he had received earlier.

Robert then headed to the mansion’s basement.

A huge magic circle laid out in the basement was the result of Robert’s research.

“Please… Elena…”

Robert placed the mana stone at the center of the magic circle.

Suddenly, the magic circle began to emit a strong light.

The circle, which hadn’t moved even with the highest quality mana stone, finally activated.

Tears started to well up in Robert’s eyes as he watched the magic circle move.

Finally, he could see Elena… bring back Elena’s form…

However, things didn’t go as smoothly as expected.

The magic circle suddenly began to vibrate intensely.

“What’s that?”

Feeling something was wrong, Robert grabbed onto the wall.

A strong pressure emanated from the magic circle.

Suddenly, a black object started to emerge, looking like an arm.

Then, a massive mouth appeared.

The arm began to grab everything around, indiscriminately seizing desks, chairs, and magical tools, and feeding them into the mouth-like part.

“What the…”

Robert was shocked.

The magic circle started to devour everything.

It was hard to understand what was happening.

Then, the black arm approached Robert.

“Ugh… Behemoth!”

With a roar, Robert quickly summoned Behemoth and cut down the arm trying to grab him.

‘It has to stop.’

Something was clearly wrong.

Despite following the theory exactly, the outcome was bizarrely unexpected.

“Ugh… It must stop…”

Robert responded to the arm with dark magic as best as he could.

But he had no idea how to stop the magic.

‘I have to destroy it.’

It was not the time to think about research materials or anything else.

Leaving this magic unchecked could endanger the mansion… and possibly Richard.

Robert poured all his mana into trying to destroy the magic circle.

That’s when he was focusing.

“Dad?”

“Ah…”

Richard appeared at the door.

“What’s this…?”

“Richard! No! Run away…!”

Then the black arm grabbed Richard.

“Ah…”

Robert let out a cry.

He had to sever that arm.

Richard… Richard…

“Those who defy the will of the gods…”

Robert was solely focused on destroying the magic circle.

“Descend.”

Then, a black object appeared behind Robert.

A demon.

He had summoned a demon into his own body.

“Protect… Richard…”

“Dad!!!!!”

The black arm tried to swallow Richard, and the demon summoned behind Robert tried to stop it.

The magic circle put Richard into its mouth, and the demon thrust its arm directly

into the circle.

Then a bright light appeared.

Boom!!!!

With a huge explosion, the black object slowly disappeared, and Robert rushed to the center of the magic circle.

“Richard! Richard!”

Breathlessly, Robert searched for Richard in the aftermath of the explosion.

Then, crying came from the center of the magic circle.

“Dad… It hurts… It hurts…”

It was Richard, screaming in pain.

Robert ran towards him.

Richard had severe injuries.

“Richard… It’s okay… It will be okay…”

“Dad… It hurts so much…”

Tears came to Robert’s eyes as Richard cried out in pain.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry… I’m sorry.”

“Sorry…? Why are you sorry, Dad… Don’t cry, Dad…”

Richard said to Robert through tears.

“Dad… Don’t cry… Don’t cry… Ah…”

“Ri, Richard. Stay, stay with me. Ri, Richard.”

Robert shouted at Richard, who was losing consciousness.

However,

"…"

Richard could no longer say anything.

"Ah… Ri, Richard… Richard…"

Bang!

As Robert was crying out Richard's name, a man entered from behind.

"Robert! What's happened here! What's this vibration…"

It was Levian.

Levian was shouting at Robert and then saw Richard in his arms.

"Robert. What on earth have you done!!! Robert!!!!!!"

Levian yelled loudly at Robert.

"Didn't I explicitly tell you not to do it!! Necromancy!!!! Necromancy!!!!!"

At the shouting, Robert turned around.

"Ma, Master…"

Levian said with an angry face.

"No, you are no longer my disciple."

Then, soldiers entered from behind Levian.

"What's going on here! This is…"

The soldiers looked around and asked Levian.

"Take him away."

“Him? But he’s a royal wizard…”

“He is no longer a royal wizard.”

Levian looked at Robert with a murderous glare.

“He’s just a criminal who used necromancy.”

Levian took Richard from his arms and had Robert taken away.

That was the last time Robert saw Levian.

---

Robert was imprisoned in a dungeon.

Then, one day, he was released from it.

“What is this?”

“By the emperor’s command. You have contributed much to the empire, so you are released. However, you are stripped of your title as a royal wizard and any honorary positions given by the empire. Instead, you are granted freedom to atone for your sins.”

“Freedom…?”

The soldiers threw Robert outside and returned to the dungeon.

Robert looked up at the sky.

He had no idea what to do next.

Elena was dead, Richard was dead, and he was abandoned by Levian.

He aimlessly wandered the battlefield.

Just to survive. Or rather, to forget the deeds he had committed, he kept fighting.

One day, after a battle, he took out a cigarette from his pocket.

Robert stared at the cigarette, then crumpled it.

He wondered what he was doing… What all this was for…

“What are you doing, Robert?”

A voice was heard.

Robert, looking at the crumpled cigarette, raised his head.

Then, he saw a middle-aged man.

Despite being aged and wrinkled, he recognized him.

“Cromwell…”

“What are you doing, Robert?”

“I…”

Whack!

Cromwell clenched his fist and struck Robert’s face.

Robert fell to the ground and looked up at Cromwell.

“Is this what you wanted? Is this what Elena wanted? Do you think Richard wanted to see you like this? Get a grip, Robert.”

“Cromwell…”

“Isn’t it time you came to your senses? It’s been 5 years. Five years since Richard died. And yet…”

“I don’t know… what I should do now. What I want. I… I…”

Cromwell stared at Robert.

Then, he extended his hand.

“Come to the academy.”

“What?”

Robert looked incredulous.

“Come to the academy.”

“That’s ridiculous…”

“I’ve already got permission from Principal McDowell. So, stop arguing and come. To the academy.”

Robert was dragged by Cromwell to the academy.

He ended up taking a position as a professor at the academy.

Robert worked there, if only to honor the man who brought him, Cromwell.

Even when random thoughts surfaced or strange feelings arose, he focused solely on his work.

During his years as a professor,

Robert met Rudy.

---

With the mana stone about to explode,

And Vendewood thrown far away,

There sat Rudy, powerless and slumped.

Robert looked around at them.

He had seen this situation before.

‘I have shown you both the past and the future. Now, what is your choice?’

It was something Saint Haruna had told him.

She had shown him both his past and future.

In the past, he had bid farewell to his wife with tears.

Sent off his son with screams of agony.

And let go of his master without a word.

Robert had been a poor husband.

A poor father.

A poor disciple.

“Rudy.”

Yet,

At the very least.

“You were my best disciple.”

He wanted to be the best master.

“Professor?”

Robert walked forward.

Behind him, a demon appeared.

Robert said to the demon,

“Destroy this mana stone.”

“What’s the price?”

“My life.”

“Understood.”

Rudy’s eyes widened.

“Professor?”

Rudy tried to get up and run towards Robert.

Robert slightly turned his head to look at Rudy.

Robert was smiling brighter than ever before.

“Take care, Rudy.”

# CHAPTER 256
# ROBERT (4)

It happened in an instant, before I could even grasp what was going on. The mana stone that was about to explode vanished, and Robert collapsed.

I don't remember much after that.

I definitely heard Ian and Astina's voices… and it felt like someone was carrying me.

"Rudy? Are you awake?"

As I slowly opened my eyes, trying to gather my thoughts, Luna was sitting in front of me.

"How long have I been lying here?"

"About three days… Can you wait a moment? I'll call the others."

"Okay."

Luna got up and left the sickroom.

I blankly stared at her retreating figure, but what I was truly curious about wasn't how long I had been unconscious.

I was certain I had met Professor Robert.

The image of him smiling lingered before my eyes.

It wasn't my imagination.

Professor Robert was definitely…

The door to the sickroom opened, and Luna came back.

“Rudy…”

Seeing Luna’s face, tears started to flow from my eyes. Luna came closer without saying a word.

“Rudy, it’s okay. Everything is okay.”

“Professor Robert is…”

I couldn’t finish my sentence as it was interrupted by my sobbing.

Luna quietly hugged me. My heart ached, and a vague feeling became a harsh reality.

“Professor Robert is no longer with us.”

---

I didn’t know much about Professor Robert’s family.

Yet, I knew Professor Robert had stories about his family.

“Do you remember what Robert said to you in the beginning?”

“…The beginning?”

Robert said that he didn’t take disciples.

“Robert didn’t want to create people he had to take responsibility for, or people who would take responsibility for him. He couldn’t bear the sorrow of losing his family and the sorrow of being abandoned by his mentor. To avoid going through that again, he didn’t try to make connections with people.”

“…”

“That’s when you came along. There was Borval, too, but he was different. The relationship between him and Robert was more professional than that of a mentor and disciple.”

Cromwell said this and took a bottle of alcohol out of his bag.

“He took you as his disciple. There wasn’t any special reason. He liked the way you worked hard.

You really struggled like hell at the academy, didn’t you?”

He brought the bottle to his mouth and gulped down the alcohol.

After drinking, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and spoke.

“To Robert, you were a commitment, a disciple, and a son.”

“…”

“Robert wouldn’t have wanted you to be so sad and downhearted. He wouldn’t have wanted you to have regrets. He would have wanted you to stand up proudly.”

Cromwell poured the alcohol over the gravestone and looked at me.

“It’s time to get up now. Shouldn’t we start moving? You have many people around you, not just Robert.”

I had many thoughts during the week I spent in the sickroom.

If I had been stronger, more cautious, or if there had been something else, could Robert have lived?

However, there are no “ifs” in reality.

I have lived my life doing my best, facing reality head-on.

If I crumble here because Robert is dead, it would be no different than destroying everything I’ve built up.

As Cromwell said, there’s still a lot left for me.

If Robert were here, he would have scolded me and slapped me on the back, asking if I was going to fall apart over something like this, if this was how I was going to end things.

I must live. I cannot fall apart here.

“You were my best disciple.”

Remembering Robert’s words, I looked at Cromwell.

“I am a disciple of Professor Robert. I cannot fall apart here.”

“Right.”

Cromwell smiled upon hearing my words.

---

Cromwell and I flew through the sky and arrived at the academy.

“Take these things with you.”

Cromwell handed me a few items. They were Robert’s belongings.

“Is it okay for me to take these?”

“I can’t take them, can I? Most of them are related to dark magic,”

Cromwell said with a smile.

“…Thank you.”

“What’s there to thank me for, giving you luggage to carry?”

“I’m thanking you for something else.”

Cromwell’s words were a great help.

Robert wasn’t the only thing in my life.

Although Robert played a significant part in my life, I still had a lot left.

The Astria family and the rebels of Aryandor.

And the people who believe in me and are waiting for me.

I'm greedy. I couldn't give up any of it.

"Then, go rest now."

"Aren't you going to take me? After bringing me here."

Cromwell laughed at my playful tone.

"It's difficult to take you by magic, but I can catch a carriage for you. Go to the front of the academy."

"Thank you."

I smiled and went outside. Outside the academy, countless cherry blossoms stood out. The rich scent of flowers was in the air. Soon, new students will enter.

Someone's life has ended, but someone else's life is about to begin.

I stretched out.

"Maybe I should see the faces of the other guys."

Though third-year students like Luna and Rie might not be around, it was about time for second-year students like Yuni and Kuhn to start returning to the academy.

"Hey, young master of the Astria family."

As I was thinking this and walking forward, someone called out to me.

"…?"

In front of me stood an old lady with her hands clasped behind her back.

"You've been busy lately, haven't you? Not even coming to eat."

This grandmother was the owner of the restaurant Robert used to take me to, a place that served cheonggukjang.

Surprised to see her after a long time, my eyes widened.

“How about a bowl of food?”

The grandmother pointed with her cane to a shabby building, where her shop was located.

“Just recently, that damned Robert came to pay off his debt and said one thing before he left. ‘I’ve paid off everything, so give my disciple a meal sometime.’“

The grandmother chuckled and gestured for me to follow her with a wave of her hand.

“Have a bowl of food before you go. I’ll make it tasty for you.”

Hearing the grandmother’s words, I smiled.

“Yes, I’ll have a bowl before I leave.”

# CHAPTER 257
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (1)

“Senior, came?”

“Wasn’t he talking with Professor Cromwell earlier?”

“Then where did he go now!”

At Kuhn’s words, Yuni stomped her feet in frustration.

“Where he is now…”

“Got it.”

Yuni nodded and went outside.

“Rudy!! Where are you!!”

Yuni shouted here and there, wandering around the academy.

During her search, someone grabbed Yuni.

Startled, Yuni looked at the person who grabbed her.

“Rudy!!”

“What, you’re making a fuss all over the place. Why are you shouting like that?”

“If you’re at the academy, you should at least show your face.”

“I was actually planning to stop by after eating.”

“Then you should have eaten with me.”

“It’s way past lunchtime. Haven’t you eaten?”

“No? Of course, I’ve eaten. Who hasn’t eaten at this hour?”

Rudy looked at Yuni with a bemused expression.

Yuni thought she was speaking normally, but concern was evident in her eyes.

News about Rudy had reached Yuni as well.

Rudy, who was considered to have a strong mentality, was struggling with the loss of someone very close to him.

Even Yuni, who usually lived without worries, couldn’t help but be concerned about Rudy.

Rudy had protected and helped her when she was in danger.

Yuni thought it was her turn to help.

“Senior, I’ve made up my mind.”

“Made up your mind?”

“I’ve decided to run for student council president.”

Rudy’s eyes widened at her words.

Yuni’s only flaw was her extreme nervousness in front of many people.

She had always failed when she truly tried her best.

Yuni was well aware of this.

“As you know, I can’t stand in front of people. But I’m going to be the student council president.”

“No… It’s better not to overdo it…”

“No, I will overdo it.”

Yuni walked boldly forward.

Approaching Rudy, Yuni looked up at him.

“Instead, please overdo it too, Rudy. Stand up, even if it’s hard, and become the Rudy you used to be. It might be forceful, but please listen to my insistence this time.”

Yuni spoke like a whining child, but her words, meant to help someone else, sounded nice.

Rudy placed his hand on Yuni’s head.

“Thank you, Yuni.”

A smile appeared on Rudy’s lips, warmed by Yuni’s kind heart.

The stubborn Yuni of the past was no more.

There was a Yuni who knew how to care for others and sometimes took the initiative.

“Are you agreeing to my request?”

“Yes, if you’re going that far, how can I stay down?”

Yuni beamed at Rudy’s words, then suddenly shut her mouth tight.

“Then, do you want to make a bet with me?”

“A bet?”

“The last bet ended in a draw.”

She was referring to the bet they made during the joint assessment.

“What’s the bet?”

“I bet on whether I become the student council president.”

Yuni said with a triumphant face.

“Alright, let’s hear this bet.”

Rudy nodded eagerly.

“The loser has to grant a wish to the winner.”

“A wish…”

Hearing Yuni say that, Rudy felt a wave of anxiety.

Who is Yuni, after all?

A little devil who surprises everyone with her unpredictable actions.

This proposal should have been outright rejected…

Yet, he couldn’t turn down someone who was taking on a new challenge for his sake.

“Don’t like it?”

Yuni asked cautiously.

That made me feel even weaker.

“Alright, let’s give it a try.”

“Really?”

“It’s a bet after all. I’ll only grant it if you become the student council president.”

“Of course~.”

Yuni stepped back.

“Just watch. Whether I become the student council president or not.”

“Alright, give it your best shot.”

Rudy and Yuni smiled at each other.

---

After meeting Yuni, I returned from the academy to the capital.

The capital was in chaos in my absence.

Rie and Luna scoured the capital looking for me, and Astina left the Royal army to search for me.

“I’m sorry… I should have said something before leaving.”

“No, no! It’s us who made a fuss. Ha, ha…”

“Still, I’m glad you’re safe.”

We met at the Astria family mansion and chatted.

Sending everyone from the Astria mansion on vacation had left it empty, but it was actually better for gathering since it was sure to be noisy wherever this group went.

I told them everything from the beginning.

Why I disappeared and what I had been doing convinced them to some extent.

Not everyone felt the same, though.

Luna and Astina sighed with relief and smiled as if to say it was okay.

“Uh…”

Rie just glared at me without saying a word.

She had been doing this for minutes, and I found myself at a loss for words, especially as she was on the verge of tears.

“I’m sorry, Rie.”

“Just try disappearing like that one more time. Really…”

Rie said with a choked-up voice.

“It’s a relief you seem a bit better now.”

“Yes, I think I know what I need to do now.”

“So, what will you do now?”

What I needed to do was already decided.

“I’ll inherit the Astria family, defeat the rebels, and…”

One more thing was added to the usual tasks.

“I will find out why Professor Robert ended up like that.”

I pondered over the death of Robert.

Robert had noticed the danger I was in.

He even predicted his own death.

The evidence was overwhelming.

Professor Robert knew everything about the situation as soon as he arrived where I was.

It was as if he had predicted his own death and settled all his affairs accordingly.

He even paid off his tab at the restaurant, not wanting to inconvenience anyone, and had somewhat organized his belongings.

This wasn’t just a series of coincidences.

There was a cause behind these events.

Reading the future, a situation where cause and effect didn’t align.

To my knowledge, there was only one person capable of creating such a situation.

“I need to find Saint Haruna.”

Until now, I hadn’t paid much attention to Haruna.

There was a promise made with Haruna when the rebels attacked the academy.

To never worry about her and not seek her help.

I would overcome everything with my own power and move towards the future.

This was a conversation we had when it was just the two of us.

I had many questions about this.

If Haruna truly acted to save the world, why wouldn't she use her abilities to save it?

She was the only one in this world who could read the future.

Even using time magic to come to this world, I couldn't see the future.

So, why didn't Haruna actively use her abilities?

Despite these questions, I hadn't sought out Haruna.

I hadn't asked.

Because that was the promise.

However, given the current situation, I couldn't not ask anymore.

The reason I hadn't asked until now was because Haruna had helped me at the cost of her own sight.

Even if such a person had influenced someone close to me, I couldn't just stand by.

"So, should I start looking for the saint now?"

"No, there's no need to waste manpower."

Haruna can see the future.

Trying to find her in conventional ways would only be futile.

"For now, we just need to continue with our tasks."

“Without looking for the saint?”

“The rebels and the order are currently unable to find the saint.”

I can’t be sure if the rebels are looking for Haruna, but from Aryandor’s perspective, Haruna would definitely be a thorn in his side.

He would be trying to find her somehow.

Additionally, the divine order to which Haruna belongs was also looking for her.

Even though the order’s power has waned, the number of people within it cannot be ignored.

Yet, there has been no news.

No one has been able to find even a trace of Haruna.

Finding a person in the empire is nearly as difficult as finding a needle in a desert, but not finding even a trace meant something significant.

“So, we just sit around and do nothing?”

“That’s not what I’m saying.”

If that was the plan, I wouldn’t have said anything.

“If we’re dealing with someone who predicts the future, we need to create a situation they can’t help but walk into, even if they foresee it.”

They must step into the trap, knowing it’s a trap.

Create a situation so compelling that, despite the risks, they must come to check it out.

It won’t be easy, but I wanted to make it possible.

“To do that, we need to know about the saint.”

Rie said in a blunt tone, glaring at me.

“Rie, can you do it?”

“It’s not a matter of can or cannot.”

Rie pulled a chair next to her, crossed her legs, and sat down.

“I’ve already done it.”

I smiled at Rie.

“I thought you might have.”

Back when Rie and Haruna first met, during our first year and when Astina was the student council president.

It was likely that Rie had already investigated Haruna.

She’s not one to let such matters slide.

“Then let’s use that information to set a trap.”

We all put our heads together and began to plan.

# CHAPTER 258
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (2)

Today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy.

Upon hearing of Perrian's death, Ian was getting ready to make his move.

News of Robert's death had reached Rudy, who remained quiet.

But that didn't mean Ian had any reason to console Rudy or wait for him.

With Perrian gone, the Duke's position was now vacant.

Someone needed to fill it quickly for the sake of stabilizing the political situation.

Ian was moving for that very purpose.

"Do you think Rudy is capable of inheriting the title?"

"Hmm…"

"Don't be coy, speak your mind."

Ian was in the midst of a meeting with his close associates from the Astria family.

"It's not unlikely…"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because the internal political situation of the empire has tilted towards the Emperor's faction with the disappearance of the former head."

"It's not because of my lack of ability?"

The nobleman Ian was speaking to waved his hand dismissively.

“That’s absurd. Your abilities far surpass those of Rudy Astria. If it were purely about ability, you’re the rightful heir.”

“Is that so? Then.”

Ian looked the nobleman straight in the eye and spoke.

“What do you think will happen over time?”

“Ah…”

“What about comparing Rudy and me 10, 20 years from now?”

“That is…”

The nobleman couldn’t give a definite answer.

Ian smiled at this hesitance.

“Of course, you wouldn’t know. Humans can’t see even an inch into their future.”

“But… We believe you are the superior one. That’s why we are here.”

“Thanks for saying that.”

Ian was pleased with the noble’s honest words.

“We all feel the same way.”

“The position of the head of the family belongs to you, Ian.”

The nearby nobles agreed.

Hearing this, Ian stood up.

“Thank you, everyone. Let’s conclude the meeting here.”

Ian smiled and left his seat.

Walking out of the room and through the hallway, Ian’s smile gradually faded.

“The head of the family…”

Ian’s plans had never changed.

To become the head of the Astria family and rise to the highest position in the empire.

However.

As Ian pushed Perrian into a corner, he watched Rudy and observed his surroundings.

They were not so different from himself.

All striving for a higher position.

From afar, he thought they were no different from him.

But getting closer revealed a new scene.

They were not just striving for high positions.

They were looking beyond.

Reaching a high position was merely a step, not the goal.

Thinking this, Ian wondered about Perrian.

If Perrian had achieved immortality and the empire using mana stones and amplifiers, what would he have done?

No need to consider others.

‘If I were to ascend to the Duke’s position, what then? What should I do next?’

Questions were the only things floating in Ian’s mind.

---

“Sorry for leaving you alone for a bit. I brought some tea.”

“If you need any snacks, just say the word. I’ll bring them over.”

“Do you like the tea? If not, I can get a different kind.”

I smiled warmly at the person in front of me, offering the best kindness I could muster.

Despite my goodwill, the person in front of me was extremely uncomfortable.

“Ru, Rudy. Since it’s just us, you can act as usual…”

“This is my usual.”

I was extending hospitality to Karen.

It had been a few days since I returned to the capital.

I was making various efforts to inherit the Duke’s title.

Practicing spatial magic, meeting people who would support me, doing various things.

During this time, one person came to visit.

Karen Mayer.

I was surprised to see her.

I had clearly told Count Mayer that I had no intentions of marriage or anything else, yet here she was.

I thought quickly.

I needed to make this person detach her feelings from me.

So, I treated Karen with all the kindness I could muster.

Showing the utmost courtesy I was capable of.

That was the method I chose to push Karen away.

“Ru, Rudy…”

“Is there something wrong? Are you feeling ill? Or is there some food you can’t eat?”

“Rudy…”

“Hm?”

Karen just repeated my name, saying nothing else.

As expected, she was at a loss for how to react to my kindness.

After shuffling her feet for a few minutes, Karen stood up.

“I’ll come back… next time.”

“Sure, you’re welcome anytime.”

I sent Karen off with a smile and returned to my room.

“Ha…”

I like to think I’m not a bad person, but offering excessive kindness was exhausting.

I sighed and looked at where Karen had disappeared.

“What should I do?”

I felt sorry for Karen, but I had no feelings for her.

She was merely a bridge I intended to use to approach the Mayer family.

Thinking this way, I was truly despicable.

But there was a tiny bit of injustice.

How could I have known that Karen harbored such feelings for me?

I intended to use Karen, but I never planned to harm her.

I just wanted to keep our relationship strictly business.

“Also, what would Rie say…”

I sighed and stood up.

Dealing with Karen was troublesome, but for now, I had other things to do.

The struggle for the head of the family position.

I need to think about this.

Normally, securing the position of the head of the family involves many steps. The family’s internal members evaluate the candidates and compete fairly.

However, such evaluations was meaningless now.

With Perrian’s death, someone needed to quickly take the Duke’s position.

There were rebels outside, and we needed to create a stable situation internally.

The question was, how do we evaluate someone?

We couldn’t take as long for evaluations as before, nor could we conclude everything with a vote among the internal members.

We needed something for the two contenders to compete in.

But we couldn’t just have a brawl like children.

If they fought normally, someone could get hurt or even die, which could weaken the empire’s strength and be a disgrace.

Therefore, we needed a fair fight under specific rules.

Recently, an answer emerged through a meeting of the empire.

Whoever accumulates greater achievements.

It was decided to compete in this way.

Over a certain period, accumulate achievements and evaluate them.

This was the best option for the empire as well.

We could win battles against the rebels or stabilize the internal chaos caused by them.

Evaluating someone based on their achievements allowed us to assess various aspects of that person, making it a good proposal for both us and the empire.

Then the inevitable question arose.

What kind of achievements should I accumulate?

Ian had the Royal army with him, but I was alone.

Though I had some people to help me, I didn't have an army.

"Achievements…"

I began to ponder this slowly.

What do I have that's superior to Ian?

In terms of spatial magic or other magical abilities, I'm inferior to Ian.

Even politically, I'm below him.

The only advantage I had was 'information'.

I knew various things about the rebels.

I had faced Aryandor's time magic and knew about the other leaders as well.

Besides information about the rebels, I also had much knowledge acquired from the academy.

So, I had to use that information to accomplish something.

"Rudy Astria. Are you there?"

Just then, a voice was heard from outside.

I immediately went outside upon hearing it.

Since there were no servants, I had to go out myself.

“Rudy Astria. How have you been?”

As I went outside, I saw the figure of Franz, the head wizard.

“What brings you here?”

“Haha, just stopping by.”

The head wizard of the empire visited my mansion without any particular reason.

I was puzzled by the situation.

I didn’t have a deep connection with Franz.

Apart from the time we cooperated, I had hardly ever seen his face.

“I came because I have something for you.”

“For me?”

Franz took a small letter out of his pocket.

“It’s something Robert left behind.”

“Professor Robert?”

I took the letter with wide eyes.

“It’s the last letter he gave me, but it looks like it’s something you need, so I came.”

I looked at Franz with a bewildered expression.

# CHAPTER 259
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (3)

Haruna doesn't know everything.

Even if she can see the future, she can't see all possible futures.

Haruna cannot control the future.

She is someone who can see the future, not someone who can control it.

Yet, everything is proceeding according to her plan.

"……"

I quietly looked at the letter.

The last message left by Professor Robert.

It was almost like a will, containing such words, and all I could do was tilt my head in confusion.

"I thought it might be related to Haruna, but……"

Why did Professor Robert write this letter?

Just reading the content makes it feel like he's warning us to stop Haruna's plan.

Does that mean Haruna's plan will harm everyone?

"No……"

Robert was a straightforward person.

If Haruna were someone who would harm us, he would have clearly written a warning.

The mere fact that he wrote this means there's significance to it.

"Hmm……"

I stroked my chin and read the letter over and over again.

---

Ian sat in the Royal Army's office, chin in hand.

"Capturing the tail of the rebels."

He was searching for traces of the rebels to build his achievements.

The dilemma he had been facing hadn't been resolved.

But pondering it forever is pointless.

Time would solve the dilemma, and Ian was just doing what he needed to do.

Ian is a commander of the Royal Army.

The Royal Army was created to counter the rebels, so investigating them was his duty.

If he managed to counter the rebels, the achievement would be his.

After all, he was the one who investigated and gathered the information that led to countering the rebels.

He might share the achievement with a few members of the Royal Army, but the greatest credit would undoubtedly go to Ian.

"Now is not the time for strange worries, focus on what needs to be done."

Ian decided to think about his duties after receiving the position of the family head, rather than worrying about it now.

Ian slowly read through the documents in front of him.

“Commander.”

Someone entered his room.

It was Astina.

Astina, with her red hair neatly tied back and dressed in uniform, entered his room.

“You’re here.”

“Yes, I’ve brought the documents.”

Astina handed over the documents she was carrying to Ian.

Normally, delivering such documents was a task for someone of lower rank, but the documents were so important that Astina delivered them herself.

Ian skimmed through the documents Astina handed over.

“There’s no significant movement from the rebels.”

“So, they only moved to kill Perrian.”

“And possibly to kill Rudy as well.”

Rudy could be considered Aryandor’s only weakness.

It was only natural for the rebels to target him.

“Is that all there is to it?”

Targeting Rudy and Perrian.

It might seem like something Ian could overlook, but it raised another question for him.

“Killing Rudy would certainly open up a great possibility for those bastards. But did they send a leader just for that?”

Killing Rudy would indeed bring a significant advantage if their plan succeeded.

However, they couldn't ignore the risk of failure.

"If their goal was solely to kill Rudy, there are many other ways to do it. They didn't proceed with those because failing would have been too costly for them."

They were willing to take risks for something they desperately wanted.

Not just to kill Rudy, but to find a way to solidify their victory.

"Are you talking about the mana stone?"

At Astina's question, Ian nodded.

The mana stone that Perrian had.

They wanted to obtain it.

According to Rudy, they pretended to cooperate with Perrian and then ganged up on him.

Killing Rudy was their top priority.

There was no room for argument about this.

Yet, killing Rudy and the importance of that mana stone were of similar importance.

They betrayed Perrian almost immediately after draining Rudy's strength, when he was off guard.

If the mana stone wasn't that important, they could have waited to seize it after killing Rudy.

But they moved first.

"What if they had waited to kill Rudy?"

"Perrian would have used the mana stone and the amplifier to cause trouble."

"For them, Perrian causing trouble would have been a hindrance. If he used life drain to suck the mana and life force from people in the capital, their path to victory would

practically disappear."

Both Rudy and Perrian were obstacles to their victory.

And the mana stone Perrian had would be a great help to them.

"Didn't we interrogate the necromancers who surrendered recently?"

"Yes, I've included the documents about that as well."

"The mana stones created by the necromancers were heavily used by Perrian himself, but a portion of them went to the rebels."

Ian pointed to the documents he had been looking at earlier as he said this.

"Then where did all those mana stones go?"

They are preparing for something using the mana stones.

Some of the stones were used for Daemon's necromancer legion, but that couldn't be all.

According to the necromancers' statements, about 5,000 mana stones went to the rebels.

That was the total amount received over a few years.

Compared to the amount of mana stones used by the empire itself, it was a small amount. However, if all of it was used for combat purposes, it was a significant quantity.

The empire used many mana stones for various facilities.

"Didn't you see the necromancer legion that attacked the Persia territory last time?"

"It didn't seem like a legion created with at least 5,000 mana stones."

"I also attacked the rebels when you were attacked, but it didn't feel like they used 5,000 mana stones for magical tools."

Ian stood up from his seat.

“So, it’s settled then.”

“Shall we track the mana stones?”

Ian nodded.

“I’ll take a few people and search. You should get moving too.”

“Understood. I’ll move out immediately.”

Astina agreed, then turned to leave.

“Astina.”

At Ian’s call, Astina turned her head.

“Act properly. Don’t move just for Rudy’s sake.”

Astina smirked at that.

“I wouldn’t do such a thing. At least I know how to separate personal matters from official duties. Besides, we have priorities that come before Rudy inheriting the dukedom.”

Something more important than the dukedom.

It was a bold statement.

The dukedom is the highest position in the empire, second only to the emperor.

No wealth or honor could match it.

Yet, there was something more important?

It was hard for Ian to understand.

Something more significant than that…

“Then I’ll take my leave.”

Astina saluted Ian and left.

“Something that comes before the dukedom…”

Left alone, Ian muttered to himself quietly.

---

“Hey, Rudy, you’re here?”

Rie greeted me with a smile.

She had her hair braided to the side and wore a white dress.

Because of the outfit, or perhaps because Yuni wasn’t there, she appeared softer than before.

“Shall we take a walk and talk?”

“I’d like that.”

I walked with Rie through the palace gardens.

The garden was full of vibrant flowers, signaling spring.

Rie slowly walked through the garden before speaking up.

“Have you thought about Haruna?”

“Yeah, I’ve thought about this and that.”

“So, what are you going to do?”

“I have a rough plan, but I’m still debating whether to go through with it.”

“What’s there to debate? Tell me, and I’ll take care of it for you.”

“It’s not that it’s difficult to implement.”

Rie tilted her head in confusion.

“What is it?”

“I’ll tell you later. If I decide to go through with it. Anyway, I didn’t come here for this.”

“Right. Wuying, come out.”

“…Wuying?”

I remembered hearing this name before.

As someone walked up from behind, I realized who it was.

“Ah… last time…”

“Rudy Astria, good to see you again.”

It was the man who had helped me when I was looking for Uncle Yurik.

“Why is he here?”

“Hm? You two have met before?”

“We have, but why here…”

As I spoke with a puzzled look, Wuying slightly bowed his head.

“I didn’t properly introduce myself last time. I am Wuying, the head of the Royal Secret Service.”

“The Royal Secret Service?”

I remembered something I had forgotten.

The fact that Rie knew I went to the ball with Luna.

He must have been the one who told her.

“How did you think I found my information?”

“Hmm…”

The source of Rie’s information was indeed the Secret Service.

At the academy, I got used to her using elementals to overhear various things, so I thought we would gather other information in the same way.

It did seem odd, though.

If Rie really listened to every sound to gather information, she would have to do that every day.

Considering Rie’s busy schedule, she couldn’t possibly have the time for that.

“Let’s get back to business, anyway.”

“Here, take this paper. It contains the information you requested.”

“Ah, yes…”

I took the paper Wuying handed me and read through it.

It contained information related to mana stones.

The focus of my investigation, aimed at building my achievements, was related to mana stones, specifically magic engineering.

One question that no one had posed so far.

When McDowell and Aryandor fought, McDowell lost an arm, and Aryandor lost a leg.

Yet, Aryandor had a leg.

A prosthetic made through magic engineering.

Initially, I didn’t question it, but seeing the mana stones created by the necromancers sparked a thought.

The rebels have an expert in magic engineering.

He received a large amount of mana stones and is preparing something.

So far, besides Aryandor's prosthetic, there have been no magic-engineered items from the rebels, despite having fought a significant battle.

"I've asked about magic engineers at the Magic Tower, and the documents include possible locations for this person. Check it out."

"Thank you so much, Rie."

Rie's lips twitched at my sincere thanks.

"How would you live without me?"

"I couldn't do without you."

"You'd be lost without me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. I'd be lost."

"…What?"

"How could I live without you?"

When I spoke plainly, Rie's eyes widened.

"What are you talking about?"

"Exactly what I said."

"Explain further. What you mean by what you said."

I smiled and gathered the documents.

"Thank you, Rie. I'll be going now."

"No, wait. Explain what you meant."

I moved my mana and approached Rie.

“Huh?”

As I approached, I kissed Rie on the forehead.

“Wha??????”

Rie looked at me as if she was malfunctioning, unable to say anything.

“See you next time.”

I enjoyed Rie’s stunned expression as I used spatial magic to teleport away.

# CHAPTER 260
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (4)

Ian surveyed his surroundings.

This place was quite far from the capital, closer, in fact, to lands held by the rebels.

“Commander, there’s nothing here!”

“Then let’s go further down.”

Rugged terrain and dense underbrush made the eastern part of the empire, known for its harsh landscape, even more forbidding, seemingly uninhabitable.

That made it an ideal location for a hideout.

“How far do you intend to go…”

“Ugh… I’m soaked through.”

The soldiers grumbled as they searched the area, where a misstep could send one tumbling down a cliff, making it dangerous. With the thick underbrush, it was hard to see where the cliffs were.

Continuing to clear the brush and push forward, it was understandable that the soldiers were complaining.

Ian watched the soldiers for a while before speaking up.

“Let’s take a break. But don’t let your guard down even while resting.”

“Oh! Finally…”

“Thank you!”

The soldiers brightened at Ian’s words. For those who had traversed the harsh

terrain, this rest was like nectar.

While the soldiers rested, Ian looked around, deep in thought.

'Is this really the right place… '

Research facilities for magic engineering are usually built in accessible locations because the things produced through magic engineering differ from regular magical tools.

Research on regular magical tools is based on deep studies of magic, whereas magic engineering focuses on mass production and efficiency.

Therefore, a typical magic engineering lab is attached to a factory, and having access to transportation is crucial for distribution.

This place was the most likely candidate among those Astina had predicted.

Although it was speculated that it could be within a territory held by the rebels, since Ian couldn't enter rebel-held lands, he had no choice but to hope this was the place.

Rustle—

Then, Ian heard the sound of brushing grass behind him.

Without missing a beat, he quickly turned and reached out his hand, thinking it was an enemy.

He was about to use magic but stopped upon seeing the person's face.

"…Rudy Astria?"

"…Huh?"

Rudy, too, was about to cast a spell but stopped upon recognizing Ian.

"…What are you doing here?"

"Why are you here?"

The two stared blankly at each other before sighing.

It had to be the same reason that brought both of them, who were supposed to be in the capital, to this place.

“Mana stones?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Did Astina tell you?”

“No, I asked Rie for information.”

“Why?”

“The recent incident and Aryandor’s bridge.”

“The bridge?”

“Aryandor’s bridge, isn’t it made with magic engineering? So…”

“…No need to say more.”

Ian wondered if Astina had told Rudy but concluded it was a pointless suspicion.

There was no reason to think that Rudy wouldn’t come to the same conclusion he had.

Regardless of how it was discovered, information about the mana stones had led to this place.

Finding this location wasn’t that difficult.

This place was near where the rebels first made their move.

If one were to think of a place where the rebels could gather strength and hide, it would be hard to consider anywhere but here.

Rudy saw the soldiers resting behind Ian.

“Did you come with the Royal Army?”

“Yes, I’m searching the area with the soldiers. Would you like to join us?”

Ian intended to make use of Rudy.

While there were enough soldiers to conduct a thorough search, there were times when the soldiers could be a burden.

It was impossible to send soldiers to cliffs or dangerous places, so Ian had to go alone when searching those areas.

Having Rudy meant they could search together, making it more efficient.

Of course, they might have to share any credit.

Finding the rebels would be a joint effort, not just Ian’s alone.

The reason for wanting to search together was also because of the possibility that Rudy could find it on his own.

If Rudy found it without him, it would be the worst-case scenario.

“Yes, that’s fine.”

From Rudy’s perspective, it wasn’t a bad proposition either.

It was much better to search together than alone.

Rudy joined the Royal Army and began searching the area.

“Rudy Astria. Found anything?”

“Do you think it would be that easy to find? But why do you keep staying close to me?”

Ian stayed close to Rudy as they searched the area.

He considered the possibility that Rudy might find something and hide it…

“Rudy Astria. Can I ask you something?”

“What is it?”

“What do you think about the position of Duke Astria?”

“The Dukedom…?”

Rudy pondered while stroking his chin.

After a brief moment of contemplation, he answered lightly.

“A tool. A tool for achieving the results I want.”

“A tool…”

It was somewhat the expected answer.

Yet, hearing it directly from him felt strange.

A position that was his entire life was merely a tool to the other.

Was this correct?

Ian felt his life become meaningless and was filled with rage.

“Commander.”

Before Ian could say anything, a soldier approached him.

“What is it?”

“We’ve finished searching the area around here. However…”

“However?”

“We can’t go any further towards the cliff, so we came looking for you.”

“Can’t go any further? Did you look for a way back?”

“We can go down to the bottom, but we couldn’t determine what’s on that wall side.”

“Understood. Let’s go. You guys keep looking around the area we were exploring. And…”

Ian looked towards Rudy.

He looked to suggest they go together, but Rudy was already on the move.

“Let’s go.”

“Alright.”

Ian and Rudy followed the soldier.

“Here it is.”

Looking where the soldier pointed, they saw a sheer cliff.

“Let’s go down.”

“…How do you suppose we do that?”

“How else are we going to descend the cliff?”

Ian stretched his leg towards the bottom of the cliff, stepping on protruding parts and lowering his body further down.

“To tackle the cliff like that…”

Rudy furrowed his brow.

“Got any better ideas?”

Neither Rudy nor Ian had any other options.

They didn’t have telekinesis like Astina, nor could they use elementals like Rie.

Although they possessed spatial magic, it wasn’t feasible to use it blindly here.

“Understood.”

Rudy braced himself and extended his leg downwards.

“If you fall, use spatial magic to move.”

After enhancing their bodies with magic, Ian and Rudy began descending the cliff.

It was their first time scaling a cliff, but they didn’t face much difficulty.

Using magic to chip away at the cliff and create ledges, they just had to lower their feet onto these ledges.

It was terrifying.

Stepping into the void where the bottom wasn’t visible was scary.

Even though using spatial magic or body strengthening meant they wouldn’t die or get injured, fear was still fear.

Yet, they boldly stepped forward.

“Shall we rest a bit now?”

“Scared?”

“Not scared at all. I just mentioned it because you’re slowing down.”

“If you’re scared, we can rest.”

“Then, let’s continue.”

Neither admitted their fear.

Admitting fear was something their pride wouldn’t allow.

Though they could rest if they stepped back a bit, they continued descending.

After a while.

“Huh?”

“Thinking of resting now?”

“It seems we might be able to.”

Rudy pointed below.

A large ledge on the wall of the cliff was too big to be just a ledge; it felt almost like new land.

“We might have found it.”

Rudy and Ian jumped towards that land. Landing there, they were greeted by green grass.

“Grass like this?”

This wasn’t a natural formation.

It should be a dense underbrush, not covered in grass like a lawn.

“Over there.”

They then saw a house in front of them.

“How did they build a house here?”

Rudy smiled slyly.

“It looks like we’ve found it.”

---

In the capital of the empire, at Duke Ophillius’s mansion.

Creak— Creak—

The sound of a rocking chair squeaking could be heard.

Jason Ophillius was sitting on it, reading a book.

Quietly reading, Ophillius closed the book and placed it on the small table beside him.

Then, he spoke.

“What brings you here?”

As he said this, the door to Ophillius’s room opened.

In the doorway stood a man wearing a hood.

“I received no reply to my letter, so I came.”

The man removed his hood as he spoke.

He had black hair.

It was Aryandor.

“I didn’t reply because it wasn’t worth replying to. Do you not understand that?”

“It seems, Master, you don’t understand, which is why I came.”

# CHAPTER 261
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (5)

“So, what are we going to do now?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are we going in, or are we calling for reinforcements? That’s what I was asking.”

Rudy didn’t hesitate and replied immediately.

“Of course, we’re going in. If there’s someone inside, they’ll know we’re here anyway. We can’t just leave.”

Ian nodded in agreement.

“Then let’s go right now.”

As Ian started to move, Rudy paused for a moment.

Ian turned to look at Rudy, who hadn’t followed.

“Is something wrong?”

“…No.”

Rudy shook his head and followed Ian towards the cabin.

Creak—

The door of the cabin made a squeaking sound as if it were old.

They extended their hands and carefully entered.

“It’s dark.”

The inside of the cabin was ordinary.

There was a sofa in the living room and a fireplace that had gone cold.

The kitchen had a dining table that could accommodate several people.

And the cabin wasn't just a single floor; stairs leading down to a basement were clearly visible.

Ian walked over to the sofa and ran his finger over it.

"It has been used."

Dust clung to Ian's fingers.

It didn't seem like it hadn't been used for years.

If it hadn't been used for years, there would be signs of bugs, but it was surprisingly clean.

Rudy headed to the kitchen and looked around.

"There are signs of use on the dishes too."

There was dust, but it didn't feel old.

And there were several dishes, indicating that more than one person had been living here.

After looking around the interior, they found nothing unusual beyond these everyday details.

"Let's go down to the basement."

Following Ian's suggestion, they went downstairs.

"Ah?"

"…This is ridiculous."

There was a large space in the basement.

It was so big that it made the cabin above seem laughable.

There were many books and signs of research.

“It looks like we found the right place.”

“How did they even make this?”

They looked around.

“Who’s there?”

At that moment, a man walked out.

He was wearing a robe like a researcher.

Ian and Rudy quickly reached for their weapons.

“Identify yourself.”

The man spoke as if he found the situation absurd.

“Shouldn’t you be the ones identifying yourselves? You’re the ones who entered someone else’s house.”

Ian and Rudy looked at each other, then spoke up.

“We are investigators from the Empire. Who are you?”

They asked the man, keeping their identities hidden.

“I’m called Raven. What does the Empire want here?”

“We’re investigating the rebels. If you’re not part of the rebels, then cooperate with our investigation.”

“Huh, is this how the Empire conducts investigations these days?”

“It’s an investigation about the rebels. If you don’t cooperate, we’ll use force.”

Raven then raised his hands.

“Sure, investigate all you want.”

Rudy and Ian were puzzled by the man’s confident attitude.

After hesitating for a moment, Ian stepped forward first.

“I’ll do the investigation.”

Rudy kept his hand extended toward Raven, and Ian went down the stairs.

“To think that you guys from the Empire have come all this way to investigate. Really…”

Raven clicked his tongue and grumbled as Ian looked around.

Ian searched for any signs of the rebels as he inspected the surroundings.

However, he found no traces of the rebels.

After all, there wouldn’t likely be any clear evidence of rebel activity.

Unless there was a letter from Aryandor or a member of the rebels present, finding such evidence would be difficult.

Still, there were plenty of documents related to magical engineering, and seeing an anvil in a corner, like in a blacksmith’s shop, confirmed it was a magical engineering laboratory.

But determining if this person was affiliated with the rebels was difficult.

Ian stopped his investigation and looked at Raven.

“Why are you here?”

“Why do you think? Is it strange for a researcher to be in a lab?”

“What I mean is, why is the lab here? Shouldn’t a magical engineering lab be in a more populated area?”

“If I put the lab somewhere conspicuous, it would only attract pests. It was too bothersome, so I set it up here. Is there a problem?”

“Pests?”

“You know, the nobles. I came here to avoid those pests who covet what I make.”

“So, how do you leave this place?”

“I use that thing.”

Raven pointed toward a corner.

There was a pair of shoes placed there.

These weren’t ordinary leather shoes but looked like they were made of metal, like iron shoes.

“What’s that?”

“These are shoes made with magical engineering. They’re enchanted with wind magic, so you can safely jump down from here and also climb up. These shoes, I mean. I deliberately twisted the mana circuits when making them. By causing the circuits to overload intentionally…”

Raven suddenly started explaining the principle behind the shoes.

As a researcher, he spoke quickly and blurted out unnecessary details once he got onto a topic he was familiar with.

Ian rubbed his head as if it were a headache, but Rudy, who was standing above, had his eyes sparkling.

“Wow… Doesn’t that strain the mana stone? Surely the stone won’t be able to withstand it.”

As Rudy showed interest, Raven excitedly waved his fist.

“That’s why I used magical engineering to reinforce the mana stone! If you look at the mana stone here…”

Rudy came down the stairs and looked at the shoes.

“You’ve done a good job.”

“Thank you. You know a lot about magic.”

“Yes, a wizard would know at least this much.”

Rudy examined the shoes closely and then turned to look at Raven.

“Can I try these on?”

“Yes, go ahead.”

Rudy put on Raven’s shoes and attempted to move.

“Wow, these are quite heavy.”

“Yes, they’re magical engineering products, so they’re supposed to be heavy.”

“How do they work?”

“Ah, there’s a device on the side of the shoe.”

Ian sighed and watched Rudy curiously.

“What are you doing…?”

“Wow!”

Following Raven’s instructions, Rudy touched the device and began to float upwards.

“Don’t activate it too strongly. A strong wind could damage the lab.”

“Ah, got it.”

Rudy floated up for a bit, moved around, and then came back down.

“This is really fascinating.”

“Ha, I’m glad you think so. I have more items to show you. Would you like to see them?”

Raven opened a storage area in the back, revealing various magical engineering devices.

“Ah, yes. But can we look around the lab a bit more first?”

“Of course, take your time.”

Rudy began to survey the lab.

Ian watched disapprovingly.

There were no signs of the rebels anyway.

It was a waste of time not to investigate this man instead.

Investigating his past might reveal any connections to the rebels.

Ian approached Rudy, who was looking around, and whispered.

“Let’s stop now.”

“What?”

“We’re taking him back to the Empire.”

“Taking him?”

“If we dig into his past, something is bound to come up.”

“There’s no need to do that.”

“What?”

Rudy smiled and looked back at Raven.

“The lab is smaller than I expected.”

“Small?”

“What are you talking about?”

Raven and Ian looked at Rudy incredulously.

“Is this all your stuff?”

“Yes, that’s everything.”

“No other storage?”

“…”

“That’s strange.”

Rudy smirked.

“A lab like this should have lots of mana stones, but there’s no place to store them. Who are you keeping all these things for in a space no one visits? And what about all the dishes upstairs?”

“Friends visit sometimes. And I get mana stones from the village as needed.”

“What about the iron and other materials? All by yourself?”

“Yes.”

“I see. So you transport all that iron with these shoes? And your friends too? Up this mountain where even a carriage can’t come?”

Raven narrowed his eyes and glared at Rudy.

“What are you trying to say?”

“I took a look at the grass outside earlier.”

“Grass?”

“It was well-maintained, but there were some pressed-down marks.”

“Oh… Is that so?”

“Those marks were like.”

Rudy extended his hand towards Raven, manipulating mana.

“The footprints of a dragon.”

To research magical engineering, transportation needs to be developed.

Good transportation doesn’t necessarily mean having commercial areas nearby or well-paved roads.

It simply means having a conducive environment for transport.

“You used a dragon for transportation, didn’t you?”

The grass in front looked like it served as a runway.

The dragon landed there and transported all the equipment.

The magical engineering devices prepared for demonstration.

A lab that was somewhat off.

Household items that were neglected but hadn’t been used in a long time.

There were more than a few oddities.

“Shall we search a bit more? A little more digging and things might become clear.”

Rudy smiled.

# CHAPTER 262
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (6)

“What do you think, should we keep going?”

Rudy asked with a smile, to which Raven sighed.

“Let’s stop.”

“Hmm?”

“You’re right. I am a rebel.”

Rudy was puzzled by Raven’s straightforward confession.

Despite admitting to being a rebel, Raven lacked the will to resist.

“What were you making here?”

“Can’t you tell? It’s related to magic engineering.”

“There are so many magic engineering items. What exactly were you making?”

Raven smiled at Ian’s question.

“Do you think I would just tell you that?”

Ian frowned and looked around.

When he had searched the room earlier, he couldn’t find any research materials.

Most of the stored materials were too ordinary.

They were not weapons or any special devices, just mundane, everyday items.

The important materials were no longer there.

It felt as if someone had anticipated their arrival.

Rudy walked up to Ian's side.

"It seems we won't find anything else here."

There was no sign of the mana stones created by necromancy, nor any documents on their use.

The items had already been passed to the rebels, and the documents had been burned.

This raised an inevitable question.

Why was this guy still here?

If he knew someone was coming, it would make sense to flee beforehand.

Yet, Raven stayed.

"Hmm…"

Ian quietly observed Raven.

After a moment of contemplation, he spoke.

"Let's take him with us."

Ian used spatial magic to open a subspace.

A pair of white handcuffs appeared, and he secured them on Raven's wrists.

Rudy and Ian took Raven outside the building.

They joined the soldiers and handed Raven over to them.

"What will you do now?"

"Hmm…"

Ian pondered for a moment then looked at Raven.

So, it ends this easily…

It left him feeling uneasy.

To hand over someone who could be part of the rebel leadership so easily?

Ian stared at Raven, then turned to Rudy.

“What about you?”

“I suppose I must return to the Empire using spatial magic.”

“Then stay here for a while.”

“What?”

“I have a plan.”

Ian said this and headed towards a carriage.

“A plan?”

Rudy, puzzled, followed Ian.

---

“Just as planned.”

Raven smiled as he was being taken away by Ian and Rudy.

The rebels’ plan was for Raven to be taken all the way to the capital.

After completing all the magic engineering devices, Aryandor had told Raven something.

“They’ll be coming here soon.”

The Empire had obtained information on necromancers.

So, they would realize that the mana stones created by necromancers had also fallen into rebel hands.

They needed to prepare for it.

“Rudy Astria and Ian are going to make a move. You need to be ready for them.”

“Prepare, you say?”

“Get caught by them on purpose. Don’t resist. And then infiltrate the capital.”

Instead of avoiding capture, the plan was to get caught deliberately.

That was their strategy.

To make this happen, Raven intentionally made his disguise sloppy.

He acted in a way that invited capture because being too obvious would have raised suspicion.

Rudy and Ian fell for it nicely.

Without any doubt, they were taking him to the capital.

Since they got nothing from the building, they would likely interrogate him for information.

This meant there would be no danger until they reached the capital.

But then.

Raven lifted his head and looked around.

Several Royal soldiers and Ian and Rudy were with him in the carriage.

Everything had gone according to plan, but something felt off.

The carriage window opened, and Ian called one soldier over.

Raven saw this but couldn’t hear their conversation from the back of the line, tied up

as he was.

“Don’t worry. We’ll get you out as soon as we reach the capital.”

Raven mulled over Aryandor’s words.

Everything would be a success once they reached the capital.

“Why do I feel so uneasy?”

“We’ll take a break up ahead! Everyone, slow down!”

The soldier talking to Ian shouted to the others outside.

The distance between the Empire and where Raven was captured is quite long.

It made sense to rest occasionally, but the timing for this break seemed too soon.

They had just rested after coming down from the mountain, and now, an hour later, they were resting again.

“What are they trying to do?”

The soldiers stopped their horses and settled down nearby.

Raven, still tied up, sat down on the ground.

“Where is this?”

Raven quietly surveyed his surroundings.

It was hard to figure out where they were since it wasn’t a proper road.

The question was why they stopped here.

Raven cautiously watched as Ian approached him.

Ian looked Raven over and spoke.

“Are you uncomfortable anywhere?”

“If I say it’s uncomfortable, will you unlock these handcuffs?”

“Of course not.”

Ian said that and then grabbed Raven by the nape.

“What?”

“Come with me.”

“What? Where are we going? What is this…”

“If you don’t move, I’ll force you.”

“Ugh…”

Raven tried to move his legs as best as he could, but he couldn’t walk properly while tied up.

Ian dragged Raven, who was almost lying down, across the ground.

Ian threw Raven onto the ground.

“Ugh…! What are you trying to do?”

Raven, thrown onto the ground, glared at Ian.

Ian then kicked Raven.

“Ugh!”

“Who told you to open your eyes like that?”

Raven glared at Ian in pain.

“Let’s start the interrogation.”

“What… what?”

Thump!

“Ugh…”

Ian kicked Raven in the stomach again.

“From now on, answer only the questions I ask.”

Raven had thought the interrogation would happen in the capital.

He never expected to be interrogated on the way there.

Ian pulled a dagger from his belt.

Raven chewed his lip, pondering.

What should he do?

He was wearing mana control handcuffs, but there was a way to escape here.

He could use a magic engineering device hidden inside his body to blow off the handcuffs.

But doing so would ruin Aryandor’s plan.

While Raven was thinking, Ian finished preparing and approached him.

“Let’s start with a question. Where is Aryandor right now?”

“…What?”

Thrust—

“Aaaagh!!!”

Ian stabbed Raven’s thigh with the dagger without hesitation.

“Answer only the questions I ask.”

“Ugh… How would I know where the leader is…”

“You don’t know?”

Thrust—

"Aaaaaagh!!!"

Ian stabbed Raven's thigh with the dagger again.

"Then we'll continue until you talk."

Raven truly didn't know where Aryandor was.

He guessed Aryandor might be near the capital, but he wasn't sure.

Aryandor had said he would come to the rescue, but he didn't know if Aryandor would personally come.

"I'll ask again. Where is Aryandor?"

"How would I…"

Thrust—

"Ugh…"

Ian was relentless.

He stabbed the thigh of his opponent, who claimed not to know, with the dagger, showing no pity or remorse.

After repeating this several times, Raven's thigh was a bloody mess.

"Heal."

Ian used healing magic on Raven.

Once the wound was somewhat healed, Ian called a soldier.

"Take care of him. We're moving out again."

"Understood."

“We’ll keep repeating this until you talk. I hope you’ll tell us before we arrive.”

“Ugh…”

The soldier helped Raven to his feet.

‘Is he insane…?’

Raven would have understood if Ian had questioned him about magic engineering devices or related matters, but Ian only asked where Aryandor was, with no other questions.

And to conduct such an interrogation in the middle of nowhere…

Raven was dumbfounded.

‘Continuing like this until I talk?’

Raven had spent his life moving from one research position to another.

He had never experienced such pain in his life. His spirit was breaking.

‘First, I’ll watch the situation. And… ‘

If the torture becomes too severe…

No…

Should he follow Aryandor’s wishes?

Raven’s spirit was breaking under the torture, a new experience for him, but remembering Aryandor’s orders, he couldn’t fall apart here.

‘I must… endure as much as I can… ‘

If he kept enduring, Aryandor would come to rescue him.

If he endures the painful torture and holds on, Aryandor will surely come.

No, he must come.

“Ugh…”

Raven spent the night biting his nails.

# CHAPTER 263
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (7)

Aryandor raised his sword.

With a light swing of the sword he held high, Ophillius' head fell to the ground.

"Hmm…"

Aryandor looked down at Ophillius' head on the floor.

After a brief moment, Ophillius' head vanished from his sight, and Aryandor's view changed.

"No matter how much you struggle, you can't escape."

Ophillius said to Aryandor with a calm face.

It was the same situation as ten minutes ago.

Aryandor had killed Ophillius several times now.

He had beheaded Ophillius multiple times and torn his body apart, only to return to this moment.

Aryandor glared at Ophillius and asked, "What are you trying to do to me?"

"Didn't I tell you? I can't die like this."

"So, you plan to suffer in this eternal moment forever?"

"Haha, that wouldn't be so bad."

"Have you finally gone mad?"

Despite being trapped in a loop, what was happening didn't feel like an illusion.

Ophillius had died numerous times, feeling the pain firsthand.

It was pain beyond what a person can bear.

Torture usually involves inflicting pain that doesn't lead to death, but Ophillius was experiencing pain beyond that limit.

Even as time reset, the pain was not forgotten; the situation just repeated.

He kept dying and coming back to life.

No matter how strong someone's will is, staying sane is impossible.

Yet, Ophillius kept his sanity and laughed.

"It's not me who's mad. Aryandor, you're the one who's insane, so everyone else seems mad to you."

"Ha…!"

Ophillius was cornered.

The fight between Aryandor and Ophillius was a battle with no chance of winning.

Despite dozens of battles, Ophillius' head had been swiftly taken every time.

Yet, he mocked Aryandor with ease.

There was a reason for his confidence.

"Do you think you can keep doing this endlessly?"

"Are you waiting for Rudy Astria and Ian?"

The reason this situation was possible was because Ian and Rudy were away from the capital.

With the two who could use spatial magic away, Aryandor could invade the capital and cause this chaos.

If they returned, they would notice the situation.

He just had to hold out until then.

But that didn't mean things would be easy.

"Do you think I came here without any plan?"

Aryandor had prepared Raven to buy time.

He had pushed Raven into a corner to delay the time it would take for them to reach the capital.

He had never intended to save Raven in the first place.

He had just thrown in a significant piece to buy time.

Ian and Rudy had a high understanding of time magic.

Rudy is compassionate, and Ian seeks the maximum benefit in everything.

Humans judge others based on their own personalities.

Considering all this, they might think the situation is a trap or that Raven is being used to lure them in.

However, Aryandor had no affection for him.

He might have had affection for objects, but not for people.

If there were something more important than saving them, he could abandon them at any time.

And things wouldn't go as Ian thought.

Ian would think that Raven, being one of the leaders, made them important.

That wasn't wrong.

Raven was a talent not easily found.

But if asked whether that was important in the current situation, it was questionable.

He had already served his purpose.

Using Raven to kill Ophillius was more important.

With all these plans in mind, Aryandor took action.

Although Aryandor could no longer see the future, as someone who understood time, he could make such predictions.

“Why bother with all this trouble? How about we just stop now?”

“That would be difficult. I have made a promise. Even in this situation, as the Empire’s Chancellor, wouldn’t it be shameful not to keep even a small promise?”

Ophillius laughed happily.

“A promise? Don’t we have one too? When I become a being that can change the world, you said you’d let me meet my family.”

“I said to become a being that can change the world, not one that destroys it.”

“Haha… And you picked me up, a person who can see the future?”

“Just because I can see the future doesn’t mean I can see all futures. I took care of you, believing in the small futures I could see.”

“That’s ridiculous. So, if I had been a good person, would I have been able to save my sister?”

Ophillius’s expression hardened at Aryandor’s words.

“…What are you talking about?”

“Did you think I didn’t know?”

Aryandor held his sword and stabbed Ophillius’s shoulder.

“Ugh…”

“That my sister became a saint, before the current saint, it was Beatrice.”

Despite the pain from the stab wound, Ophillius’s confusion did not fade.

Aryandor wasn’t supposed to know about her death.

That was the future.

Specifically, all the futures Ophillius saw when he could see the future were like that.

A slight deviation.

A future that deviated from the majority of futures.

The future Ophillius hoped for and believed in had twisted in the worst possible direction.

“And you hid that…!”

With a voice filled with anger, Aryandor beheaded Ophillius.

As Ophillius’s head fell to the ground, the situation reset to the beginning.

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“Cough…”

Ian looked at Raven, who was exhausted from pain and letting out a hoarse voice.

A day had passed.

They continued to interrogate him approximately every two hours while moving.

Yet, Aryandor didn’t come.

Ian started to feel something was off.

Was Aryandor not planning to rescue him?

Judging this in just a day might seem premature, but decisions had to be made quickly and accurately.

Ian realized that the ongoing interrogation and movement were causing significant delays.

The arrival time in the capital was getting pushed back, and the distance to the capital wasn't decreasing.

'There must be a reason he's not coming to rescue him.'

Raven's situation of hiding alone was suspicious from the start.

He wasn't conducting any research there; he was just killing time.

It was clear there was some trap, but what it was, was hard to determine.

Ian stared at the fallen Raven for a moment before standing up.

"Take him. We're moving."

"Understood."

A soldier watching from a distance came over and helped Raven.

'We better keep moving towards the capital.'

Continuing the interrogation seemed pointless.

Raven must know important information, but he showed no signs of talking. If Aryandor was really scared of Raven spilling the beans, he would have come to rescue him by now.

There must be another reason he hasn't come.

That was Ian's conclusion.

Aryandor might have a different location to attack, or perhaps he has an entirely different plan that doesn't involve an attack.

“Over there.”

“Did you call?”

“Tell everyone to move faster from now on. We’ll reduce the number of interrogations, so don’t slow down until I say so.”

“Understood.”

The soldier took the order and returned to his position.

After making sure the formation was ready, Ian slowly returned to the carriage.

‘What are you thinking, Aryandor?’

While Ian was deeply pondering,

There was someone genuinely curious about Aryandor’s thoughts.

“Aryand… or…”

A person unable to fully regain consciousness, suffering.

It was Raven.

Having been tortured several times a day, his doubts about Aryandor grew.

‘Are you coming? Or… when we arrive at the capital… ‘

Raven and Aryandor had discussed that he would be rescued upon arrival in the capital.

However, in his current state, he doubted he could last until then.

Ian did cast healing magic to ensure he wouldn’t die, but that only made the pain worse.

If he could at least lose consciousness, he might escape the situation momentarily, but the healing magic prevented that.

‘I can’t bear this any longer, Aryandor.’

The plan was one thing, survival another.

While the plan might be important, enduring this pain made the success of the plan meaningless.

‘These bastards are cruel. We might not even head to the capital.’

Aryandor hadn’t explained anything to Raven.

Not knowing the plan, his doubts deepened.

‘Their schemes could mess up the operation.’

Then Raven would suffer in vain, the operation would fail, and it would all be meaningless.

Raven looked at the handcuffs on his wrists.

Although he had a way to unlock them now, once inside a proper prison, that method would become useless.

‘But even so… ‘

Sabotaging Aryandor’s operation would be like turning his back on the rebels.

Of course, Aryandor might admit his mistake and accept it, but that seemed unlikely.

Raven closed his eyes and recalled the past.

The promise with Aryandor.

‘If you help me, I’ll create a place for you to belong.’

Raven had been satisfied until now.

Life in the cabin with the rebel guys was what he had wanted.

People were truly deceitful.

He couldn't forget those times and thought they were happy, but avoiding the pain right in front of him took precedence over protecting that place.

'I'll run away.'

The convoy transporting Raven moved, and Raven steeled his heart, waiting for the right moment to escape.

# CHAPTER 264
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (8)

Ian was sitting in a carriage, scribbling something on a piece of paper.

The operation they were originally supposed to carry out had effectively been stopped. So, he had to come up with a different plan and was jotting down those ideas on the paper, pondering over them.

Suddenly, space warped in front of him, and Rudy appeared.

"…Rudy Astria?"

"Ah, I got here in one piece."

"Why are you here all of a sudden? Weren't you supposed to stay back there?"

"What am I supposed to do in an empty lab?"

"Didn't I tell you the plan?"

"The plan isn't going as expected."

Ian had thought that this plan needed to be concluded within a day at the least. It involved capturing a high-ranking talent who was even being tortured. How could their leader remain idle?

Aryandor exceeded Ian's expectations. It wasn't so much that Aryandor surpassed him; it felt more like Aryandor was an unfathomable being. It wasn't about the depth of thought but rather that Aryandor had a completely different mindset.

This plan was based on Ian's common sense. It couldn't possibly apply to Aryandor, who existed beyond that common sense.

"Since the plan has already collapsed, it was pointless to stay there. It doesn't look like things will proceed normally even after this much time has passed."

Rudy was right. They already knew Aryandor was not acting normally. There was no reason for Rudy to remain there.

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Ian readily admitted it. Thinking he understood Aryandor was a mistake. Ian had received a lot of information and analyzed Aryandor’s actions, thinking he had a good understanding of him. However, that was arrogance.

Ian looked at Rudy in front of him. He had known Rudy as family for a long time. If he couldn’t even understand Rudy, how could he understand Aryandor, whom he had barely met?

“So, what will you do now?”

“I’m still thinking about it.”

That said, his mistake wasn’t anything big.

Instead, this small mistake allowed him to learn more about Aryandor in detail.

Ian thought about these mistakes as he tried to devise a new plan. Rudy nonchalantly nodded and opened the window.

“Where are we, by the way?”

“You came here without even knowing where it is?”

“I thought it might be around here and searched the area.”

“You came without a plan.”

Rudy shrugged nonchalantly. Ian sighed and spoke up.

“We’re on the road from the eastern Per Mountains to the capital. We should see the Fenden Plains soon.”

As Ian said, the carriage moved a bit, and a vast plain appeared.

“So, are you planning to go straight to the capital?”

“For now, yes. There’s no need to delay.”

There was no need to stop and interrogate further. Ian’s goal was to draw in Aryandor.

The plains continued all the way to the capital, making it impossible for anyone to launch a surprise attack. If they couldn’t lure Aryandor, there was no need to proceed with the interrogation.

“Still, it’s not like we’re returning with nothing, so there’s no problem, right?”

From the empire’s perspective, they had already achieved a significant victory by capturing a high-ranking member of the rebels without a single wound.

However, Ian’s worries stemmed from his desire to maximize the benefits from this situation.

While they were carrying out the empire’s mission to capture rebels, Rudy and Ian were also competing for the position of family head. Without a fierce battle with the rebel leadership, this smooth operation didn’t allow for showcasing their differences.

Ian wanted to achieve greater results with his plan to prove he was superior to Rudy.

More capable.

That’s what Ian wanted to say, but…

‘I can’t twist the situation to my advantage.’

If he really wanted to make a name for himself here, he could delay his travel to the capital and continue with the interrogation or even choose not to go to the capital at all. Yet, he did not take such actions. He was merely considering the best course of action.

“Well, if nothing happens, we’ll just have to be satisfied with how things are.”

Ian nodded lightly.

Rudy looked puzzled at Ian’s attitude.

Ian narrowed his eyes and asked Rudy, “Is there something wrong?”

“…No.”

Rudy didn’t say much more and continued,

“Then, I’ll be returning to the capital. Since I’m just escorting, there shouldn’t be any problems.”

“Did you come here just to say that?”

“I just thought it was the best thing to do after seeing the situation.”

Rudy was right. There was no need to keep Rudy here unnecessarily.

“Yeah, that’s probably for the best. Contact me if anything happens.”

“Understood. Then I’ll be…”

There was a small click.

Yet, Rudy and Ian heard it clearly. They instinctively sensed danger.

Ian shouted quickly, “Get down!!”

BOOOOM!!!

A massive explosion sounded right behind the carriage where Ian and Rudy were.

The carriage they were in was caught in the explosion.

“Ian, sir!!”

Soldiers a bit away from the carriage were shocked by the explosion. Although they couldn’t see through the flames, it was clear the carriage was swept up in the blast.

The soldiers ran towards the explosion, trying to get inside.

“Huh?”

The soldiers, getting closer to the site of the explosion, stopped in their tracks when they saw someone inside.

Raven stood in the midst of the flames, unharmed despite being surrounded by fire.

The soldiers stared blankly at Raven before snapping back to reality, spurred by the sight of the destroyed carriage in front of him.

“Save the commander!”

The soldiers rushed towards Raven.

Raven turned his head.

The soldier in front froze as soon as their eyes met.

A sense of terror enveloped him.

Despite only making eye contact, he felt chills all over his body.

As the soldier attempted to step back in fear, Raven moved towards the soldiers.

It happened in an instant.

Raven reached the soldiers at an incredible speed, leaving them unable to react or resist. He grabbed the neck of the closest soldier.

The soldier screamed, but Raven hadn’t grabbed his neck tightly.

Not tightly doesn’t mean he was gentle; it just means he didn’t break the soldier’s neck.

The soldier, caught in Raven’s grip, screamed in pain and glared at him.

“You… bastard…”

Raven looked at the soldier with a faint smile.

“Feel the same pain I did.”

The soldier gasped for air, his face turning red. Despite struggling as much as he could, it was futile. He couldn't resist, only flailing his limbs.

Raven watched the suffering soldier with a smile.

Then, a low voice echoed, "Spatial Severance."

A small gap appeared near Raven's arm.

"Hmm?"

A gap formed on the hand and shoulder holding the soldier, and Raven's arm was cleanly severed.

The soldier fell to the ground thanks to the arm being cut off.

Raven, stunned, looked at his severed arm before turning towards the source of the voice. Ian was there.

"What, you're fine?"

It seemed like Ian had completely avoided damage.

There were slight traces of soot on his clothes and some burns on his arm, but nothing serious.

"What's the point of resisting now?"

"Do I really need to answer that?"

Ian narrowed his eyes.

Raven's demeanor had changed.

When they first met in the lab, he had the aura of a researcher—businesslike, with a bit of enthusiasm in his field, a typical researcher vibe.

Now, that aura was gone. Even with his arm severed, he was indifferent, speaking in a languid tone.

“Why didn’t you just die quietly?”

“You were the one who was so loud when you tried to kill me.”

“Don’t you think struggling would only make it more painful?”

Ian laughed incredulously.

“If you had the ability, you wouldn’t have been caught, right?”

“Is that so? I don’t think that’s the case.”

“Arrogant, even without an arm.”

“Arm?”

Raven looked towards his severed right arm.

Stones and dirt from the ground began to gather towards his arm, shaping into the form of an arm.

“Now I have it.”

“Is that so? Then I’ll just have to remove it again.”

Ian extended his arm. Raven didn’t just watch.

“Try then.”

“Sure.”

Suddenly, a voice came from behind.

From behind, space twisted.

Rudy appeared behind Raven.

“Ah?”

“But, I wasn’t planning on stopping with just an arm.”

Raven's eyes widened.

He hadn't seen Rudy at all for a day.

Yet, suddenly, Rudy appeared here.

Before Raven could react, Rudy aimed for Raven's heart without hesitation.

Rudy's arm pierced right through Raven's heart.

"You shouldn't let your guard down."

Raven, with his body pierced, looked at the arm through him and then raised his head.

He stared straight at Rudy and said, "Looks like that's my line."

Raven lifted the corners of his mouth.

# CHAPTER 265
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (9)

Rudy's hand had definitely pierced through the heart.

He felt the sensation in his hand.

Raven didn't move an inch.

Instead, he smiled.

Seeing his face made Rudy shiver.

"Damn…"

Rudy quickly tried to pull his arm out.

But it wasn't easy to pull away.

Raven's skin, his body that had been pierced, tightly gripped Rudy's arm.

"Thinking of leaving just like that?"

Raven grabbed Rudy's arm with his hand.

"Since my arm got cut off, yours should too, right?"

"Ugh…"

Raven's grip on Rudy's right arm was strong.

It was stronger than any human could manage.

Despite reinforcing his arm with mana, Rudy felt pain.

'Mana reinforced…? No… the heart was definitely… '

Rudy had definitely burst the heart.

For a wizard, the heart does more than just pump blood.

It stores mana and distributes it, allowing for magic use.

With the heart burst, using magic should have been impossible.

Ian quickly assessed the situation and charged at Raven.

“What’s a wizard doing coming close?”

Raven lifted his stone arm towards the charging Ian.

When his stone arm touched Ian, it emitted a strong light.

The stone turned into dust and scattered in the air.

Ian immediately reached out his hand towards Raven.

Rudy moved at the same time.

He gathered mana in his free left hand.

Ian and Rudy both attempted to attack Raven together.

Raven moved quickly, assessing the situation.

He twisted his body, pulling out the arm embedded in him, and ducked.

Rudy’s arm, which hadn’t moved until then, suddenly came free easily.

By ducking, Rudy and Ian ended up charging at each other.

“Get out of the way on your own.”

“Ugh…!”

Ian kept moving forward, and Rudy twisted his body to avoid him.

Had Rudy's reaction been slightly slower, they would have collided.

Raven watched them miss each other and dodged to the side.

"Damn… That was close. 'Get out of the way on your own,' he says."

"It's better for one person to dodge than for things to get messed up trying to avoid each other."

"Then you could have dodged."

"You move better than I do."

Ian and Rudy started glaring at each other.

"Both of you seem pretty relaxed."

Raven narrowed his eyes and spoke to them.

They both looked at Raven, who made such a comment.

"How is that guy still standing?"

"I have no idea."

He had a huge hole in his body and was missing an arm.

It wouldn't have been strange if he were dead from such injuries.

There was no blood coming out of his body, nor did he seem to feel any pain.

"He's like a machine."

He was like a machine.

A machine without pain or emotions.

"Was he like that when you tortured him?"

"No, he was normal back then."

At a certain point, he completely changed from a person.

Not only the body but also the mind.

“Suddenly changing…”

It was not his real body then.

If he hid his real body with an explosion, that would make sense.

However, there was no other presence around.

Even when Rudy scanned the surroundings with mana, he couldn’t find anyone hiding.

There was only an overwhelming presence coming from Raven.

Based on the mana alone, he felt like a different person from when they first met.

“Can something like this even be possible?”

“Discussing it won’t give us an answer.”

Ian moved forward, manipulating his mana.

“Fighting might give us more details.”

Sparks flew near Raven.

Then, dirt gathered from the ground and stuck to his arms.

The dirt formed something resembling gauntlets.

But these were no ordinary gauntlets.

Gauntlets the size of a person replaced his arms.

First, they needed to figure out what that magic was.

“I’ll go.”

“Understood.”

Rudy stepped forward, and Ian stood behind him.

They moved in sync without needing to speak.

Rudy charged at Raven immediately.

Raven knew of Rudy’s abilities, but Rudy didn’t know his.

Yet, it wasn’t a big problem.

In close combat, Rudy was as good as Aryandor.

He was confident, even without knowing the opponent’s abilities.

Raven swung his dirt-made gauntlets at the charging Rudy.

Despite the large gauntlets, his movements were fast.

Still, Rudy read his movements.

Even if fast, the large fists made their movements obvious.

Rudy pulled back his stepping foot and raised his arm.

He blocked one gauntlet and dodged the other.

Moving as little as possible.

He blocked and dodged Raven’s attacks with the mindset of not giving his opponent any opening.

There was a slight numbness in the arm that blocked the gauntlet, but it was not a problem.

Seeing his attack didn’t work, Raven continued his assault.

His attacks were fast.

Too fast for a normal person to react to, and even difficult for a swordsman to counter.

Yet, Rudy dodged all of them.

Not even a scratch appeared on his body.

Rudy, who had neglected physical training while studying and practicing spatial magic, hadn't lost his skills.

His body, endlessly trained since the academy, didn't lie about his efforts.

'Dodge to the left. For the next attack, step back briefly, then move in.'

Rudy noted every small movement and planned his next action.

There were slight errors in his movements.

It was a natural result, given his break from training.

Rudy gradually reduced these errors.

Continuing the attack would eventually create an opening.

While Rudy blocked Raven's attacks, Ian looked for that opening.

"Spatial control."

At Ian's voice, Raven tried to step back.

But he couldn't move back.

He was trapped.

An invisible wall blocked Raven's back.

"We can't just let him escape."

What Ian used wasn't an attack.

It was a move to block the enemy's retreat.

"Spatial Severance."

He immediately used magic afterward.

With his back blocked, Raven only had the side to escape to.

There was no time to think deeply.

He had to make a quick decision.

Raven threw himself to the right.

But whether to the right or left, both were dead ends.

"Phew…"

Rudy, standing in front, took a deep breath.

He gathered mana in his fist.

The movement of mana stirred the wind around him.

Raven, unable to properly position himself after throwing his body, frowned.

Crackle…

Raven quickly used magic.

But Rudy wasn't one to miss an opportunity.

"Ha!"

There was no need to get closer.

Rudy threw his punch.

The wind pressure from the mana engulfed Raven.

Simultaneously, the mana gathered in Rudy's fist was released, creating a massive mana storm.

Crash!

"Argh…"

Raven's body was briefly swept by the mana storm, resulting in numerous injuries.

To avoid this, Raven used magic.

He removed the gauntlets from his hands and placed his hands on the ground.

Then, sparks flew from Raven's hands, and his body was propelled into the sky.

It was as if the ground was pushing Raven away.

Seeing this, Ian laughed.

Rudy laughed as well.

It was exactly as the two had planned.

Rudy would block the opponent's movement, and Ian would look for an opening.

Though they had never coordinated before, their thoughts aligned.

And so did their actions up to this moment.

Ian reached out his hand towards Raven.

In mid-air, there's no escaping an attack.

Unless one uses telekinetic magic or something similar for aerial movement, there's no way to dodge.

Of course, there's the option to defend against an attack.

But the answer to that was quite simple.

Make an undefendable attack.

“Spatial Severance.”

Raven had no means to block spatial magic.

It was a technique that left him with no choice but to dodge.

A black rift formed in the center of Raven.

Spatial Severance is a spell that’s easy to dodge due to its activation time.

But when hit squarely by such an easily dodged spell.

Crack.

It was powerful magic.

Raven, hit directly, was swallowed by the rift in space.

The name of the spell itself was “Severance,” but Spatial Severance was more about blowing away a certain space.

Since Raven was in the center of that rift, his body vanished.

Thud… Tinkle.

Parts of Raven’s body fell from the sky.

His body was gone, but parts like his head or legs remained and fell to the ground.

“Ugh.”

Rudy narrowed his eyes at the gruesome sight and turned his head.

“So much for his big talk.”

“Want to say that after fighting 2-on-1?”

“He was overconfident even before the fight began. I could have won alone.”

“Sure you could have.”

Rudy sneered and laughed.

“Commander!”

At that moment, the soldiers shouted.

Crackle… Fizz.

The sound of sparks accompanied the soldiers’ voices.

Rudy and Ian turned their heads towards the direction of the sound.

Dirt was clumping together with the sparks.

“What’s that?”

“…”

That magic was definitely Raven’s.

Raven’s body had been blown away by spatial magic.

Yet, Raven’s magic was still activating.

“What a headache.”

Ian ran his hand through his hair.

The dirt kept gathering, and like a golem, the form grew larger.

“What will you do?”

“We fight. Are you planning to run?”

“Of course not.”

Rudy rolled up his sleeves and walked forward.

“Let’s go then.”

“Yeah.”

Rudy and Ian walked towards the golem.

# CHAPTER 266
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (10)

Boom!!

As Rudy swung his fist, the golem's face blew off entirely.

"Dissolve."

Simultaneously, Ian used magic.

The part of the golem's leg where Ian placed his hand crumbled into the dirt and shattered.

The dirt, returning to its original state, fell to the ground.

Without its legs, the golem began to tilt as it lost its balance.

But it didn't fall.

As the legless golem tilted, dirt gathered at its feet, and in an instant, new legs formed.

Rudy narrowed his eyes and approached Ian.

"Really tough. How long do we have to do this?"

"His mana can't be infinite."

"Then he should have fallen by now. Why does he look perfectly fine?"

Rudy and Ian had been attacking the golem for hours already.

They tried slicing the body with spatial magic and chipping away at it with other attacks.

No matter how much they attacked, the golem didn't fall.

Sand continued to gather, repairing its body, and if left alone, the body even grew larger.

It only got stronger, never showing signs of weakening.

After hours of continuous mana consumption in battle, Ian and Rudy were gradually getting exhausted.

As they grew more tired and their opponent didn't budge, they felt increasingly drained.

Rudy clenched his fist.

"I don't think we can go on like this."

"Then what do you suggest we do? Run away?"

"Absolutely not. Considering we'd have to fight again later, it's better to finish it now."

So far, all the rebels they observed were strong in prolonged battles.

Aryandor uses time magic to heal, and Venderwood regenerates his body.

The Golem in front of them also possesses a similar ability, so it's clear they'll be a problem later.

"So, what will you do?"

"A war of attrition would be disadvantageous for us."

Rudy looked up at the golem's body.

Its body, growing larger.

If left alone, it would reach the size of almost a castle.

"Surely, Raven is supplying it with mana."

“That’s right.”

“Then shouldn’t we just take down Raven.”

It was easier said than done.

“A guy who lived even after being blown apart. You think we can kill him?”

“If he were a normal person, it would be natural to die when blown apart. It’s also natural for mana not to be supplied when the heart is burst. He has a specialty doesn’t he?”

Rudy slowly considered.

How he was still alive.

What his specialty was and how he used it.

“Are you talking about magnetic magic?”

Ian had also noticed.

Magnetic magic.

The magic that uses the force to attract and repel objects.

Like using a magnet, it could be applied in various ways.

With sparks flying as magic was used, and by utilizing attraction and repulsion, they notice upon closer observation.

“Including magnetic magic, he utilized a certain part of magic engineering as well.”

To maintain a body, organs and various functions within the body are necessary.

The heart has its own role, and the lungs have theirs, sustaining life.

But what if there were something that could replace those roles?

Normally, one would have to attach various machines to perform the functions of the

body, but it might not be strictly necessary.

He maintains his life using magic engineering products.

With magnetic magic, it could be made possible.

Magical tools could take on the role of organs, and something like biological signals could be sent through magnetic magic.

Magnetism itself made it possible to create tools that could replace the functions of the body.

There might be academic doubts about whether this is possible, but that was the only way he could live.

“However, he didn’t have any magic engineering products on him.”

“You don’t know that. He could have implanted them inside his body.”

There was one likely place for that.

If he can maintain his consciousness and use magic even after being blown apart.

“His head?”

He implanted a magic engineering product in his head.

He’s prolonging his life with that product.

This was the most plausible theory.

“Then, if the mana in the magic engineering product is completely depleted, he would die. Are you suggesting we keep up the war of attrition?”

“Not exactly. The point is that he has a device that sustains his life.”

There exists a core within him.

Rudy had encountered such beings before.

Undead revived through necromancy.

They also had cores made with mana stones.

If one considers that Raven's golem might also have such a core, it was somewhat manageable.

The problem was that it was a slightly different situation than the undead…

"I can read the flow of mana to roughly locate where the core is."

"You can't know for sure?"

"That golem itself is already an entity tightly bound by magic. It's as if currents are continuously flowing, spreading mana throughout its entire body."

The golem itself is maintained by magnetic magic.

Mana flows throughout its body, and if that mana is cut off, it would immediately fall apart.

Therefore, it was harder to find the core than with necromancy.

"Does that mean you can roughly know?"

"Yes, I can at least point out its approximate location."

As Rudy answered, the golem swung its fist at him.

Rudy glanced at the fist and lifted his foot.

Boom!!!

Rudy kicked the golem's fist, causing a loud noise.

The golem's arm exploded from Rudy's kick, and sand scattered around.

Rudy then turned to Ian, who had been watching, and asked,

"So, what will you do?"

“Why do you keep asking that?”

Rudy kept asking Ian.

It was as if he was testing Ian.

“But you are the commander here, aren’t you?”

Ian furrowed his brow.

Rudy wasn’t just asking these questions because he was simply a commander.

“So, what will you do?”

Rudy asked, looking at Ian.

“……”

Ian pondered.

It wasn’t really a question that needed pondering.

Ian could break through that golem.

He specialized in control magic.

Not just suppressing objects, but controlling and manipulating them.

The ability to disassemble, combine, and alter compositions.

Ian was good at spatial magic because he had learned such magic.

Essentially, spatial magic is about controlling space itself.

Merging spaces, moving them, controlling them.

It was very similar to how control magic is used.

However, Ian had a flaw despite knowing how to use such magic.

He lacked breakthrough power.

To kill an opponent, a significant final technique was needed.

But Ian didn't have such a technique.

While techniques using spatial magic compensated for this, it didn't create new techniques out of nothing.

Ian simply never felt the need for such techniques because he never had to properly fight someone of equal skill.

Ian was always above everyone else.

But, as Rudy suggested, breakthrough power was essential.

It wasn't just about destroying the core; effectively, Raven inside the golem had to be dealt with in one go.

Therefore, the best choice was for Ian to block the golem while Rudy made the breakthrough.

Ian slightly turned his head and looked at the soldiers.

Numerous soldiers were watching this situation.

If Ian blocked the golem here, and Rudy finished the situation, all the credit would go to Rudy.

'What will you do?'

Rudy's words echoed in his head.

Ian thought.

What will I do?

Which option should I choose in this situation?

"Huff……"

Ian took a deep breath.

Then he looked at Rudy.

“I’ll break through. You kill Raven.”

Ian had made his decision.

He chose the best option available.

Rudy asked Ian.

“Are you sure about this?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean.”

Ian’s lips curled up.

“Do you think I’ll lose the Duke position over such a trivial amount of credit taken by you?”

Ian had been contemplating.

Rising to the position of a Duke, what should he do?

Is it okay to just aim for the Duke position?

He hadn’t found an answer to these questions yet.

But Ian didn’t care.

He would do his best to rise to the Duke position.

He would think about what comes after that later.

Once he reached that position, wouldn’t a different landscape be visible?

He was immersed in the tasks at hand right now.

He will do his best here.

He will do the best he can with what he was capable of.

Thus, he heads towards his goal.

“I am Ian Astria. The person who will become the Duke of the empire doesn’t cloud his judgment for such trivial reasons. And I won’t lose to someone who thinks of the Duke position as merely a tool.”

He had reached his own answer.

Ian appeared more confident than ever before.

Rudy smiled at that sight.

“Good.”

“Don’t make any mistakes.”

“I won’t.”

The two walked forward.

# CHAPTER 267
# FAMILY HEAD CONTEST (11)

“What the hell are they doing?”

Raven, trapped inside a golem, furrowed his brow.

The duo that had been relentlessly attacking him suddenly started acting strangely.

“It’s better for me if it goes like this.”

Although only his head remained, Raven could survive by dragging out time.

The reason Raven could stay alive was thanks to the magical engineering device embedded in his head.

This tool compensated for all the bodily functions.

His research, buried in a remote area, focused on the human body.

Aryandor’s ability to perform almost as well as before, despite losing his leg, was a result of Raven’s studies.

Moreover, Raven didn’t just study the human body; he researched the bodies of all living beings.

He sought ways to enhance the corpses used in necromancy and created magical engineering products for this purpose.

Such ongoing research allowed Raven to survive, even as just a head.

“When they’re tired, I’ll escape immediately.”

Raven’s goal wasn’t to kill those two; it was his own survival.

Even without a body, he could live.

Just as Aryandor's prosthetic was made through magical engineering, so could a body be made, and as long as the mana stone in the life-extension device embedded in his head was replaced regularly, he could continue to live.

"If I survive, I'll have to go into hiding for a while."

He couldn't reveal himself until the rebels were gone.

Raven possessed a lot of confidential information about the rebels.

The research he conducted was the very purpose of Aryandor.

If exposed, it would be clear what needed to be done to stop the rebels.

If Raven survived here, he would undoubtedly become the rebels' primary target.

That didn't mean he intended to side with the Empire.

He couldn't be sure that joining the Empire would ensure his safety.

It would be a stroke of luck if he asked them for help and wasn't tortured.

So, for Raven, fleeing and living quietly was the best option.

As he planned his escape, Raven looked towards the capital of the Empire.

"Aryandor…"

It was a hopeful thought.

Even if he had decided to betray him, he wondered if Aryandor might come to rescue him.

But there was no sign of Aryandor coming.

The man who had reached out to a despised magical engineer from the Empire.

Raven shook his head.

That was all in the past.

Aryandor had abandoned him, and he needed to focus on the present.

Raven looked at Rudy and Ian in front of him.

“Hmm?”

The two of them were acting strangely.

Ian approached the golem, and Rudy stepped back.

“What are they trying to do?”

The physical capabilities of Ian and Rudy were vastly different.

Ian had never been on the front lines, whereas Rudy had magic optimized for combat on the front lines.

For the two of them to switch places was practically insane.

“Time to get ready.”

The two were plotting something.

Raven intended to exploit such a situation.

---

Ian stood still, looking up at the golem.

“I can’t dodge every attack with my abilities.”

Ian couldn’t move like Rudy did.

Even with physical enhancement, he couldn’t freely control his enhanced body.

But he still had to do what needed to be done.

Even if he was attacked, even if the opponent tried to block him, he had to fulfill the promise.

“Phew…”

Ian took a deep breath and opened his eyes wide.

“Here I go.”

Ian manipulated his mana.

His body disappeared in an instant.

Space warped in front of the golem, and Ian appeared.

Spatial teleportation.

He had moved through space to reach the front of the golem instantly.

The golem, anticipating this, immediately swung its fist.

“Disassemble.”

Ian extended his hand towards the incoming fist.

As Ian’s hand touched the golem’s fist, it exploded with a ‘bang!’ and disintegrated.

Seeing the golem’s fist disappear, Ian turned his head and used another spell.

“Move.”

Ian’s body, which was falling, was teleported back in front of the golem.

“A little more to the right!”

Rudy shouted at Ian.

“I know.”

The place Rudy mentioned was the golem’s right side.

Ian was currently in front of the golem’s solar plexus.

He needed to move a bit more.

“Control.”

Ian touched the golem’s hand and used his magic.

Zap…

Then, the earth that made up the golem’s body moved, and a platform was created for Ian to stand on.

He controlled the opponent’s magic as if it were his own.

Ian continued to create platforms he could advance on.

From the golem’s solar plexus to its right side.

Ian immediately ran across the platforms he created.

“Rudy Astria!”

Ian shouted as he ran.

“I know.”

Rudy pulled his fist back.

Ian clenched his teeth and tried to reach the part Rudy had mentioned.

Crack.

However, it wasn’t easy.

The golem’s body wobbled, and spikes protruded from that part.

It had transformed its body to create spikes.

“Cough…”

Ian couldn’t react.

No, he saw it happening but couldn't move his body.

The spike pierced Ian's abdomen.

"F*ck…"

A curse flew out of Ian's mouth, who usually spoke like a noble.

Pain emanated from his abdomen.

Ian touched the spike.

"Disassemble…"

Then, the spike made of sand disintegrated and fell to the ground.

With the embedded spike gone, Ian moved his legs again.

There was no time to cry out in pain.

The golem didn't stop there.

It continued to produce spikes on Ian's path, trying to block his way.

Ian twisted his body as much as he could to dodge the spikes, but he couldn't avoid them all.

Many thoughts ran through Ian's head.

Did he need to move foward in this condition?

Perhaps it would be a better judgment to retreat and regroup.

Ian clenched his fist.

He cast aside such thoughts.

Wasn't this what he intended to do?

Wasn't this much anticipated?

Ian moved forward.

He advanced despite the thorns scratching his body and the sand blocking his path.

Using spatial magic and control magic, he cleared the way ahead.

“Rudy Astria!”

Ian shouted.

Hearing his voice, Rudy immediately took action.

He kicked off the ground and propelled his body into the air.

“Disassemble!”

At the same time, Ian, having teleported to the promised spot, used his magic.

Zap… Zzzzzzap!

The sparks flying around were all dissipated.

The thick sand that was covering the surface and blocking the inside was cleared away.

It all turned to dust and disappeared.

As it cleared, the sight of Raven, with only his head remaining, was revealed.

“Found you.”

With a murmur, Rudy gathered mana in his fist.

“Ugh…”

Raven, seeing Rudy in front of him, gritted his teeth.

He tried to use magic to repair the golem’s abdomen.

But the sand didn’t move.

Ian, in front of the golem's abdomen, was controlling the golem's body, preventing Raven from manipulating the sand.

"Eradicate it."

"Shh!"

At Ian's command, Rudy swung his fist.

Mana burst from his fist.

It was different from the air pressure before.

The mana didn't disperse around but focused on one point.

Like a flash.

Like a thin spear.

It shot forward.

"Ah…"

Boom!

The shot mana pierced through Raven.

Not just Raven, but it also pierced through the back of the giant golem.

Raven, with his head pierced through, looked into the distance with a blurry vision.

"Aryandor…"

Until he lost consciousness, Raven gazed at that distant scene.

But Aryandor did not come.

---

"Ugh… Walk carefully."

“My condition is a mess, how can I consider yours too.”

“You’re in bad shape, but at least your mouth is alive.”

“That’s the same for you, isn’t it?” Rudy was supporting the injured Ian as they walked.

The ground was covered with the remains of the golem that had been defeated, scattering the dirt.

After defeating Raven, the golem had completely collapsed, and its dirt had spread around.

At their feet lay Raven’s head, barely recognizable in form.

“Is he dead?”

“We’ll have to check to know for sure.”

Rudy, supporting Ian, sat him down on the ground and approached Raven’s head.

As expected, there was a tool embedded with a mana stone in his head.

“Hmm… Seeing that the tool isn’t broken, he might still be alive.”

His head was clearly pierced through.

So, it was hard to call it a head anymore, but the magical device was still intact.

Not knowing Raven’s abilities precisely, it was hard to tell if this meant death.

“Do we take him with us like this?”

“No, it’s unlikely he’ll cooperate anyway, so just detach the device from his head and take that.”

“Understood.”

With that, Rudy wrapped up the task.

Ian managed his wounds and sat in the carriage.

Rudy, seeing Ian aboard the carriage, knocked from outside.

“What is it?”

“I’ll be returning to the capital first.”

“You’re not asking for my opinion this time?”

Rudy shrugged at Ian’s comment.

“Now that everything is finished, why bother asking for opinions?”

“All operations conclude only when we reach the final step of the plan.”

“You’re quite strict. So, are you not going back?”

Ian lifted the corners of his mouth.

“I’ll go slowly, you go ahead.”

“…Understood.”

Rudy frowned as if wondering why he even asked in the first place.

Simultaneously, Rudy began to manipulate his mana.

“Then, I’ll head back first. See you in the capital.”

“Alright.”

Rudy used his mana to travel to the capital, and Ian told the soldiers outside the carriage.

“We’re also heading back.”

“Understood!”

Ian started moving towards the capital with a satisfied smile.

# CHAPTER 268
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (1)

“Well, I’m not sure if I’ll do well, but now that it’s decided, I’ll give it a try.”

The blonde girl standing on the podium said in an arrogant tone.

The students below buzzed at her words.

“Is that right…?”

“A princess saying something like that…”

All the murmuring came from the first-year students.

They were puzzled by the speech, having heard from the seniors that she was a good person, but then seeing her behave like this after becoming president.

However, the reaction from the second-year students was different.

“That’s just how she is.”

“She may talk like that, but she does her job properly.”

The opinion among the second years was very positive.

The atmosphere was that she was much better than those who only talk big.

“That was Yuni Von Ristonia.”

The student council elections at the academy had ended, and Yuni had ultimately taken the president’s seat.

Yuni was able to sit in the president’s seat thanks to the active support of the second years.

When Rudy was at the academy, Yuni followed him around and did various tasks, from errands in Gracie's lab to student council work, without discriminating.

Despite being a princess, her willingness to do such menial tasks in the past had earned her a very good reputation among the second years, resulting in her taking the president's seat.

Yuni finished her speech and slowly stepped down from the podium.

"Hehe…"

A slight smile formed on Yuni's face.

"She's happy about becoming president; she'll do well, right?"

"Probably?"

The students took comfort in Yuni's smile.

None of them had seen Yuni naturally smile like that before.

Seeing her smile like that because she became president made them think she must have been ambitious about the position and that she would work hard.

However, Yuni's smile was not because she was happy to become president.

'I won, senior.'

The bet she had with Rudy.

If she became president, he would grant her a wish.

Yuni was happier about winning the bet with Rudy than the fact that she became president.

'So… I should go back to my room and tell Rudy… '

"Yuni, where are you going?"

Kuhn called out to Yuni as she was about to head back to her room.

“Oh~. Isn’t it our vice president?”

Kuhn was serving as the vice president in Yuni’s student council.

He had no intention of doing student council work again, but he felt anxious when he heard Yuni was becoming president.

Kuhn knew the original personality of Yuni.

Until now, Rudy had been there to control Yuni, but now Rudy was not present.

They had to lead the academy with the people here.

So, Kuhn reluctantly decided to play the role of restraining Yuni.

“So, where are you going?”

“…To the dorm?”

“Aren’t you going to do student council work?”

“Huh?”

Kuhn grabbed the back of Yuni’s neck.

“Thinking of slacking off on the first day?”

“No, what work on the first day? On the first day, there’s…”

“No time to relax. We’re swamped with work.”

“Oh, no. Just for a moment!”

“What moment. Hurry up and follow me.”

Thus, Yuni was dragged to the student council room by Kuhn, her neck firmly in his grasp.

---

“Ugh, I’m exhausted.”

Dragging my weary body, I returned to the capital and back to the mansion.

Having barely slept properly for days and wandering through strange mountains, it was only natural to feel exhausted.

Still, one task had been completed.

We had caught one of the rebel leaders, and the battle for succession…

“Oh? Has Young Master Rudy returned?”

A maid welcomed me as I entered the mansion.

All the maids who had been on leave had returned.

I smiled and waved at them.

“Nothing happened to you all, right?”

My casual greeting caused the maids’ expressions to harden.

“Well…”

“Was there a problem?”

“Oh, not with us, but… there was a problem in the capital.”

“In the capital?”

As I tilted my head, the maid continued.

“Chancellor Ophillius has disappeared.”

“Chancellor Ophillius?”

My eyes widened.

That he had disappeared.

A chill went down my spine.

“How long has he been missing?”

“It’s been four days now. He disappeared right after you and Ian left.”

I frowned.

He had suddenly made a move?

Jason Ophillius.

The Empire’s Chancellor.

I had suspected him of being a time magic user.

My suspicion began in earnest after learning that the royal head wizard was not a time magic user.

Considering the evidence and the incident, I suspected Chancellor Ophillius might be the time magic user.

Of course, there were so many other things that I couldn’t delve into it properly…

“What is the Empire doing about it?”

“For now, they’re spreading wanted posters everywhere and searching. The Chancellor is old and not a wizard…”

To the public, Chancellor Ophillius was known merely as a civilian exceptional in administrative tasks.

He had never been seen using magic, nor was he a swordsman.

“Alright, I understand. I’ll go in and rest.”

“Understood. I’ll prepare a bath for you.”

As I headed to my room, I stroked my chin in thought.

My first thought was whether Chancellor Ophillius had joined the rebels.

If so, why join the rebels now?

If the Chancellor had been with the rebels from the beginning, their power would have been much greater.

Chancellor Ophillius, though not skilled in magic or swordsmanship, was recognized solely for his administrative capabilities.

He was a hero to the common people, practically the spirit of the Empire.

If such a person claimed the Empire was corrupt and headed to the rebels, the people's hearts would have completely turned.

Nothing remains in a place that has lost the support of its people.

If the rebels managed to occupy some land and establish a new state, all commoners would surely turn to them.

Yet, he had not done so.

Had he now gone to the rebels?

Without even declaring his intentions?

It's unlikely he would do something so inefficient.

"Then…"

I looked out the window towards the Royal Palace.

---

The next day, Ian entered the capital.

As soon as I heard the news, I headed to where the Royal army was stationed, assuming Ian would have gone there first.

Upon arriving, I stared blankly ahead.

"…"

There was Rie.

"Rudy Astria. Good timing. Take this guy off our hands."

Astina, the deputy commander of the Royal army, sighed and spoke. It made sense for Astina to be here, but why Rie?

I asked Rie with a puzzled look, "Why are you here?"

"If Ian returned, I figured you would come."

"…So you came to see me? A personal matter?"

Rie shook her head at my question.

"Not entirely personal. There is a personal reason, of course."

Ian sighed at this exchange.

"I'm tired of this. Everyone out."

"Yes, yes. As if we wouldn't leave on our own."

Rie glared at Ian as she spoke.

"Anyway, what brings you here?"

"Chancellor Ophillius."

My expression hardened at Rie's words, as did Astina's and Ian's.

"Have you found Chancellor Ophillius?"

"What do you mean? Has something happened to Chancellor Ophillius?"

Rie narrowed her eyes and glared at both Ian and Astina.

"Now you ask for cooperation after not offering any?"

Astina sighed.

“If you had started with that, we wouldn’t have acted this way.”

Rie slowly walked over and casually sat down in a chair.

“Anyway, no time for jokes, I’ll get straight to it. It seems Chancellor Ophillius was attacked.”

I silently nodded, the conclusion I had reached alone yesterday matched.

Astina asked, “Attacked? Any evidence?”

“The lack of evidence is the evidence itself. Would Chancellor Ophillius suddenly disappear? Where could a perfectly healthy person have collapsed? Or, could he have joined the rebels?”

“That’s what I think.”

At my words, Astina furrowed her brows.

“What are you talking about, Rudy Astria?”

“If he was attacked, what method would leave no evidence?”

Astina tilted her head at my words.

“Attacked without leaving evidence…”

“No, it’s not that no evidence was left.”

Rie grinned broadly.

“Exactly, my husband. You caught on quickly.”

“Husband…?”

“Cough…”

At Astina’s reaction, I coughed and looked at Rie.

“You’re asking me to check if time magic was used?”

“Yes. Since you’re a spatial magic user, you might find some traces.”

I nodded.

“Then let’s go right away. Can we go now?”

“Yeah, with me here, we don’t need special permission.”

“Then…”

“I’ll come too.”

“I’m also going.”

As Rie and I were about to leave, Astina and Ian also rose from their seats.

“…What are you two coming for? Ian Astria, didn’t you say you were tired?”

“If it’s about using spatial magic, I might be more helpful, right?”

“I’m going as the deputy commander of the Royal army. If the rebels really did attack the Chancellor, we need to respond accordingly.”

Their reasons had their own logic.

I turned my head to look at Rie.

“Rie.”

“…Alright. Let’s all go together.”

We followed Rie.

# CHAPTER 269
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (2)

Rie led us toward the Ophillius mansion.

As we arrived near the Ophillius mansion,

“Rudy.”

Noticing Ian was somewhat far away, Rie called out to me.

“Hm?”

“Is it really okay to bring Ian along?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

Rie narrowed her eyes and looked at me.

“You know the competition for the head of the family is ongoing. You could be letting Ian snatch away the merits you could earn here.”

“Ah, if it’s about that, I don’t mind.”

At my response, Rie tilted her head in confusion.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly as I said. Anyway, let’s go inside.”

While we were talking, we had arrived at the Ophillius mansion.

A few soldiers were in front, and it was noisy inside as if an investigation was underway.

Rie ignored such people and walked into the mansion.

Though it was a bit audacious, I naturally followed her in.

Thud!

“Who are you? You cannot pass here without permission.”

Then, a soldier thrust a spear in front of Rie.

Rie glared sharply at the soldier’s action.

“Ah…!”

The soldier widened his eyes upon seeing Rie’s face.

“My apologies! Princess… Please, go ahead. I’m very sorry!!”

Despite not saying much, the soldiers bowed their heads repeatedly at Rie.

The bowing soldier then looked back at us following Rie.

“May I ask… who are the people behind…?”

“Among them are Rudy Astria, the second son of the Astria family, and the commanders and deputy commanders of the Royal army. I’ve permitted their entrance, so it should be fine.”

“Understood.”

Following Rie’s words, the soldier bowed his head.

“Let’s go in.”

“Can we really just walk in like this?”

I asked, feeling uneasy.

Though it wasn’t a lie, was this approach really okay?

“I’m the main person in charge of this case, what problem could there be?”

“You’re the main person in charge?”

“Even though I may look approachable, I’m the first princess. The princess who will soon become the emperor. I can certainly handle an incident of this scale.”

She had a point.

Despite being a princess, Rie wasn’t just a flower in a greenhouse.

She had experienced many incidents, had ample experience, and the capability to resolve them.

I wasn’t sure about her current progress in magic training, but she was definitely competent to handle such an incident without issue.

“Sorry I underestimated you. You really are something.”

“Hmm!”

Rie was pleased with my compliment and smiled.

Thus, we entered the mansion.

“Your Highness, it’s an honor to meet you.”

Then, the investigators inside bowed to Rie.

“Any progress in the investigation?”

“None. It’s been at a standstill.”

“Is that so? Then step aside. I’ve brought people who will investigate in your stead.”

The investigator, looking bewildered, turned to look at us following Rie.

“Ah… those people…”

“Got it, now clear the way. Send the soldiers away.”

“Understood.”

The investigator, along with the soldiers who were inspecting the mansion, exited the premises.

The not-so-large Ophillius mansion felt quite empty once everyone involved in the investigation had left.

“It feels sparse for a duke’s mansion.”

Astina’s comment was met with a nod from Rie.

“I’ve heard from others that it has always been like this.”

“Others, as in the servants?”

“Not just the servants, but also other visitors to the mansion, both.”

Following Rie’s response, Astina nodded and looked around.

“Hmm…”

Ian, after observing the surroundings, closed his eyes.

He was trying to sense the spatial domain.

Inspired by Ian, I followed suit, taking a deep breath and focusing.

Then, I delved into the spatial domain.

It wasn’t certain whether spatial magic had been used to manipulate time.

However, it wasn’t entirely impossible either.

If the spatial domain had been tampered with through time magic, traces of such interference could be detected.

I surveyed the space within the mansion.

The area around the living room showed no abnormalities.

I expanded my search to various locations: the kitchen, the library, and the

bedrooms.

"…Ah."

During my search, I found it.

Scars left in the spatial domain.

Just as a severe wound on a human leaves a scar during the healing process, if the spatial domain had been distorted, it would leave behind scars.

These scars would disappear after a certain period, but they would remain for at least a month.

"Did Aryandor visit?"

Ian seemed to have also noticed the scars in the spatial domain.

"That seems most likely."

It was improbable for Minister Ophillius to have suddenly used time magic.

Even if Ian and I were absent, there was no reason to boldly utilize time magic like this.

If we were to return, this act would be immediately discovered.

Rie, observing our reactions, posed a question.

"Then, can this serve as evidence?"

"Moved somewhere using spatial magic… Something like that?"

"They moved?"

"If there's an impact on the spatial domain, it means the space itself was tampered with."

The conclusion was that a place was moved to using time magic.

This was all we could ascertain.

The specific location or the reason behind such a choice was unclear, but it was certain that Aryandor had been here.

Ian, upon confirming this, looked at me and Rie.

“So, what do we plan to do with this information?”

“We need to find them, of course.”

“And if we find Minister Ophillius, what are the chances he’s still alive?”

“Practically…”

None.

Minister Ophillius is essentially powerless.

He lacked any combat-related abilities.

Such a person wouldn’t last a few seconds against Aryandor.

“Still, we need to search for him.”

“Instead, Aryandor might use him to set a trap.”

“But, there’s still a chance that Minister Ophillius is alive, right?”

Though uncertain, there’s a very slim chance.

If he really is a user of time magic… he might be able to hold on somehow.

“Are you saying he can hold on until we find him?”

I couldn’t respond to that.

Quite some time has already passed.

Moreover, we currently have no evidence at all.

We don’t know where Minister Ophillius is or what condition he’s in.

Gathering such evidence, even a time wizard couldn’t hold on.

They’d give up, both physically and mentally.

“We need to find him as quickly as possible.” “How?”

The method to find Ophillius with the evidence we have now.

Such a method does not exist.

However, we didn’t necessarily need our evidence to find him.

“We’ll have to ask someone who knows where Aryandor is.”

Ian furrowed his brows.

“A person who knows where Aryandor is? If there was such a person, we would have already used them.”

“We didn’t know where that person was at that time.”

“So, you know now?”

“We still don’t.”

Ian snorted as if it was absurd.

“Are you trying to play a game with me?”

“No. I don’t know where that person is, but…”

I smiled.

“I’ve found a way to summon that person.”

---

The next day, a huge commotion erupted at Liberion Academy.

“The head of the Astria family has been decided!”

“No, why did Rudy suddenly give up?”

The reason was a special issue spread throughout the empire.

Rudy Astria, the second son of the Astria family, had declared he would give up the position of family head.

This news was quite shocking to the academy.

Just yesterday, there was news that Rudy had captured the rebel leadership.

Though Ian was involved in the capture, the credit was more heavily attributed to Rudy.

In such circumstances, Rudy gave up the position of family head.

All students couldn’t shake the question from their minds.

“Is it because of Minister Ophillius?”

With the empire’s two dukes absent, Rudy sacrificed himself because of this.

This was the most plausible speculation among the students.

As the students were exchanging all sorts of conjectures,

“…So you don’t know either.”

Cromwell was talking with Yuni, having called her.

Not only the students, but they too were confused by these rumors.

The professors were also puzzled about what was happening.

In the capital, he was striving to become the head of the family.

If he suddenly gave up like this, there must be some reason.

Still, since Yuni was in constant contact with Rudy among the current second-year students, they thought she might know something.

“Yes, I’m just as confused.”

“Sigh… Alright. Are you having a hard time with the student council president duties?”

“It’s tough every single day. I wish I could quit if possible. I wonder how Rudy managed to do this for a year. Is there no way to quit?”

“…No. You can go now. Take care.”

“Yes.”

Yuni left Cromwell’s office, licking her lips in disappointment.

While everyone was making a fuss about Rudy, Yuni wasn’t particularly interested.

It wasn’t as if Rudy was forced to give up; he chose to do so on his own.

There must be a reason for it.

Rudy had made a promise to Yuni.

Not to be discouraged by Robert’s death and to rise again.

Thus, this wasn’t really giving up.

It must be a stepping stone for the next phase.

Yuni had no doubts about it.

More than these rumors, Yuni was more worried about having to go to the student council room and work again today.

“Maybe I should escape just for today… I want to take a break…”

Even as she thought this, Yuni’s feet were heading towards the student council room.

Every day she grumbled and seemed like she might quit the next day, but surprisingly, she was earnestly committed to her work.

“I’m here…”

Yuni opened the door to the student council room with a drooping head and a listless voice.

“Yuni’s here.”

“Oh, you came?”

The student council room was in a noisy state.

“Why is it so noisy…”

Yuni, puzzled, lifted her head.

In front of her,

“Are you here?”

Rudy was sitting in the student council president’s seat, smiling brightly.

# CHAPTER 270
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (3)

I used spatial magic to arrive at the academy.

The place I arrived at was the student council room.

I moved there upon hearing the news that Yuni had become the student council president.

"……Rudy?"

Someone called me as I arrived.

Turning around, I saw Kuhn.

"Ah, Kuhn. It's been a while."

"……Is it really you, Rudy?"

"What, is there a fake me?"

Kuhn brightened up at my playful words.

He approached me with a smile.

"How are you here? I thought you were busy."

"I've become a bit more free now. Hasn't the academy heard?"

"Ah……"

A shadow fell over Kuhn's smiling face.

"Why that face? It was my choice."

“What?”

“What’s with that? Did the rumor spread weirdly?”

I tilted my head in confusion.

I was sure I had spread the rumor that I had quit myself……

“I thought you quit for a different reason. Weren’t you trying to become the head of the family?”

“Ah, it’s not like that. It’s not like I suffered a huge loss and quit.”

“You didn’t?”

Kuhn was puzzled when the student council room door opened.

Is it Yuni?

As I turned towards the door, I saw 3-4 students.

I tilted my head at the unfamiliar faces.

“Uh……?”

“Vice president? Who is this……”

“Vice president?”

“Ah. I am currently holding the position of vice president.”

“Ah, it’s a bit late but congratulations.”

“What’s there to congratulate me on? You know how hard this job is.”

“I can’t very well say I’m sorry to hear that, can I?”

As I chatted familiarly with Kuhn, dozens of question marks appeared over the heads of the students who had entered the student council room.

“Vice president, who is this person?”

“……Ah?”

Then one student’s eyes widened.

“Ru, Rudy Astria?”

At the student’s words, the eyes of the surrounding students also widened.

“He’s older than you guys, and a former student council president. Add honorifics.”

“……Is, is it really? Are you really ‘that’ Rudy?”

I didn’t quite understand what ‘that’ meant, but I nodded anyway.

“Are these the first-year students who just enrolled?”

“Yes, that’s right. We are first-year students affiliated with the student council.”

I looked at them and smiled.

“Nice to meet you. I am Rudy Astria, the former student council president.”

“Gasp……”

Upon my introduction, the fellows didn’t know what to do and gasped for air.

“Oh, the person I saw in the newspaper yesterday is right in front of me……”

“Am I, am I dreaming?”

“Ah……”

Their reactions varied.

Even I would probably react similarly if I saw someone from yesterday’s newspaper, but it was somewhat awkward to be on the receiving end of such reactions.

“I, I’m a fan of Rudy! I’ve heard so much about the achievements you’ve accumulated

at the academy! The stories of when you faced the rebels still send shivers down my spine even now!"

"Ah, thanks for that."

"Being the second son of a ducal family, you must be incredibly busy, right? How come you're at the academy……"

"Just had some business here. Oh, and speaking of which, Kuhn. Since I entered the academy using magic, don't I have to be listed in the entry logs?"

"That won't be necessary. You haven't officially graduated yet."

As I talked with Kuhn, the students' eyes widened even more.

"Could it be…… if you entered using magic, did you use spatial magic……?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"My God……"

The students began to make a fuss.

Some declared it a great honor to see a user of spatial magic in person, while others spouted all sorts of nonsense.

"So…… how do you use spatial magic?"

"That's a family secret, so I can't tell you. Just know it's not a magic that can be used casually."

"Amazing, to use magic that can't be used casually……"

"Ah, yeah…… Thanks."

As the students continued to fuss, I started to feel tired.

Keeping up with their energy was difficult.

"Rudy, didn't you say you had business to attend to? If you keep staying here……"

“Ah, it’s fine. I came to meet Yuni.”

“Is that so? Then, please take a seat and wait. I’ll bring out some tea.”

Kuhn said this and gestured towards the president’s seat.

“……That’s the president’s seat.”

“You used to sit there every day.”

I glanced at Kuhn and then sat down in the president’s seat.

Better to sit in a familiar spot than in a stranger’s.

“Wow……”

“Last year, Rudy was sitting in that seat……”

“Incredible……”

As I sat down, the students let out another round of admiration.

It was just sitting down; I didn’t get what was so amazing about it.

While compliments were nice the first or second time, constantly receiving such reactions was just exhausting.

“I’ll go brew some tea.”

“Ah, vice president! Let me do it……”

“No need. You must have a lot of questions for Rudy. Use the time to ask them while I make tea.”

“……Sigh. Thank you.”

I watched Kuhn walk away.

Receiving questions had become part of the routine.

I sighed and looked at the eager first-year students.

“Alright, go ahead and ask your questions.”

“Thank you!”

So, while Kuhn went to make tea, I began answering the students’ questions.

I explained about life at the academy and the academy’s evaluation system, and also talked about the characteristics of the professors and incidents that happened at the academy.

After bringing the tea, Kuhn handed it to me with a smile.

“You seem to be getting along quite well with the kids.”

“Getting along well…”

I wanted to say I was dying of exhaustion, but seeing the kids’ eyes shining with anticipation, I couldn’t bring myself to voice those words.

“More importantly, when is Yuni coming?”

Kuhn glanced at his watch.

“It’s about time she should have been here… If she’s much later, I might have to go fetch her.”

“…Fetch her?”

“Yes, I often end up having to do just that.”

“Hasn’t Yuni only recently become the student council president?”

“It was the same when planning for the election. But she’s once caught, she does work hard, so no complaints there.”

“That’s good to hear.”

At least Yuni works well after she’s pinned down.

Having shared a laboratory with Yuni, I knew this all too well.

“Shall we go fetch her then?”

“Let’s wait a little more…”

The door to the student council room swung open mid-conversation.

“I’m here…”

Yuni was at the door.

“Yuni’s here.”

“President, hello!”

“President! There’s someone waiting for you!”

The kids greeted Yuni, chattering away.

Yuni frowned and looked up.

“Why so noisy…”

Then, Yuni and I made eye contact.

I smiled broadly and waved.

“Have you arrived?”

“…Senior?”

Yuni’s eyes widened.

Then, she narrowed her eyebrows and rubbed her eyes a few times.

“Am I so tired that I’m seeing things?”

“Do I look like a hallucination?”

"…Is it really you, senior?"

I got up from my seat.

"Talking here might be a bit much; let's go somewhere else."

I looked at Kuhn.

"I'm borrowing Yuni for a bit. A day should be fine, right?"

Kuhn momentarily wore a displeased expression but then nodded.

"If you could answer some questions about the handover documents later, then sure."

"…You've grown a bit of a backbone."

"We've got to milk what we can, right?"

I chuckled.

The kid I first brought in had been reluctant to do anything with the student council, but now he felt like a proper member.

"Alright, I'll help."

"Then, have a good time."

Kuhn smiled.

---

I walked out with Yuni, strolling through the garden.

"Did you come after receiving my letter?"

"Letter?"

"You must not have received it. Then again, a letter wouldn't reach you in just a day."

Yuni clicked her tongue and looked at me.

“So, what brings you here? You’ve been up to some strange things, I’ve heard. Is there something you need help with?”

“Huh?”

I tilted my head, puzzled.

Yuni narrowed her brows.

“You’re not here to ask for help with something?”

What’s she talking about?

“Not at all. We had made a bet, remember?”

“A bet? So, you came here because of a bet? But, didn’t you say you hadn’t received the letter?”

I wasn’t sure what was written in the letter, but I guessed it was something about asking me to come to the academy.

“Since I heard you became the student council president, I thought I’d come and grant your wish.”

“Did you really come here to see me?”

“Um… Yes?”

I started to say something else but then swallowed my words and nodded instead.

There was another reason for my visit, but seeing Yuni was part of it.

Yuni’s reaction was better than I had expected.

“You came all this way to see me? Really?”

Her eyes sparkled, and she leaned closer to me.

I pushed Yuni slightly back and nodded.

“Well… Yes, but… Anyway. So, what’s your wish?”

Yuni, smiling brightly, grabbed my wrist.

“Let’s go for now.”

“…Where to?”

I started being dragged away by Yuni without getting an answer.

“Hey, at least tell me where we’re going… No, what’s your wish?”

“You’ll find out if you follow me. Let’s go.”

Yuni led the way with a happy smile, not losing her cheerful demeanor as she walked.

Seeing Yuni so happy made me smile too.

“Alright, let’s see what you’ve been wanting to do.”

I followed Yuni, saying that.

# CHAPTER 271
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (4)

“I thought you were taking me to some grand place, but here?”

The place was a bakery in front of the academy.

It was a bakery that Rie and Luna often visited, so I was familiar with it.

“Is that not okay?”

“There’s nothing wrong with it.”

“Shall we decide where to go next, then?”

Yuni said with a bright smile.

I looked at Yuni, licking my lips.

“So, what’s your wish?”

“Ah! I just remembered there’s a place I want to visit!”

“What is your wish?”

“How about the restaurant in front of here? My sister and Luna said it’s delicious.”

“……”

Even when I asked, Yuni didn’t respond.

She just smiled broadly, saying only what she wanted to say.

I sighed.

Eventually, she would talk on her own.

For now, I thought it was best to just go along with Yuni.

“What restaurant is in front?”

“You know, the restaurant we went to for your birthday.”

“Oh, that place?”

She was talking about the restaurant we went to during our first year, reserved by Astina.

Thinking about it, this bakery was also one that I had visited with Rie.

I prefer going to places I know.

“I’ll make a reservation.”

Since there was still some time left until dinner, I decided to make a reservation and look around the area.

As I was about to get up, Yuni grabbed my arm.

“Where are you going?”

“I said I’m going to make a reservation.”

“Tsk! Where are you wandering off to alone! If we’re going, we should go together!”

Yuni spoke as if she was scolding a child.

“So, what now?”

You couldn’t dine at that restaurant without a reservation.

It was a busy restaurant and, due to its policy, reservations were absolutely necessary.

“Why not go together? Why do you want to go alone?”

“…….Alright.”

I nodded with a puzzled face.

I thought she would prefer it if I said I'd go alone…

Considering Yuni's usual reactions, her response left me bewildered.

"But let's go slowly, okay?"

"Alright."

There was still time until dinner, so it seemed okay to take it slow.

However, that was a mistake.

"I'm sorry. The reservations are fully booked, so it might be difficult to dine today. Would you like to book for tomorrow or the day after instead?"

We headed to the restaurant after eating what we ordered at the bakery, but we couldn't make a reservation.

The restaurant was so famous that the reservations were filled up before dinner time.

I sighed and looked at Yuni.

"I want to eat here today."

Yuni spoke to me as if there was no problem at all.

"What can we do if it's already fully booked?"

"Just mention your name, right? No, should I mention mine?"

I sighed again.

"Then someone else won't be able to eat."

"Tell them to eat tomorrow."

"Can't we eat somewhere else? There are plenty of other restaurants."

“No, we can’t.”

Yuni was firm.

She had been smiling all day, but now her expression was serious.

I really didn’t want to do this…

I turned my head and looked back at the restaurant.

“Um…”

“Ah, yes. Have you decided?”

“Is there… no one you can call immediately, no special anniversary today? I’ll pay 5 times… no, 10 times the amount, so could you please push the reservation to tomorrow…”

“……What?”

“I really can’t help it… Is there no way?”

The staff member looked at me, flustered.

Then, a man walked out from inside the restaurant.

“What’s going on! Hurry up and come inside to help!”

“Ah, Master.”

Since they called him Master, he must be the chef of the restaurant.

“What? What’s the problem?”

The chef stood in front of me, looking annoyed.

“This customer wants to make a reservation. But we’re fully booked right now…”

“The reservations are closed, what do you want to do? Today’s reservations are…”

“But, they asked if it’s possible to make a reservation even if they pay 10 times the amount.”

Then, the chef furrowed his brows.

“……10 times?”

“Yes, 10 times the amount would be paid to whoever changes their reservation for us. We’ll pay a similar amount to the restaurant as well.”

Hearing my words, the chef furrowed his brows.

“……Is it for one person?”

“No, for two.”

The chef looked at me and then at Yuni, who was standing a little behind.

Suddenly, the chef looked resolute.

“We have to change it……”

“……What?”

The chef put his hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eye.

“Let me handle this, I’ll change the reservation somehow. This could last a lifetime if we mess this up. I have to… ahem. Anyway, let’s change it right away.”

“Ah… Thank you.”

I smiled awkwardly.

If he’s going to step up like that, it works out for me.

“Could you tell me your name?”

“……My name?”

“Yes, I need to write it in the registry.”

I hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“Rudy Astria.”

“……What?”

Both the chef and the staff member looked at me with incredulous faces.

“That… the one we know?”

“Yes, that’s right… Please don’t tell others.”

I preemptively spoke up, worried my name might be used to snatch away someone’s reservation spot.

The chef nodded vigorously.

“Of course. We will definitely make room. For the peace of the empire…!”

“……?”

Was this really about the peace of the empire…?

Regardless of the reason, I was grateful they made room for us.

“We’ll make room somehow, so just come at dinner time.”

“Ah, yes. Thank you. Ahaha…”

I nodded and turned back towards where Yuni was.

“Senior, what happened?”

“Ah, they said they’d make room. No need to worry.”

“You should have just said your name earlier.”

“It’s not because of my name. They just decided to make room out of consideration.”

At that, Yuni made a pouty face.

“Senior, you’re so stubborn about weird things.”

“It’s called having a conscience.”

“Anyway, let’s look around. I have a few things I want to see.”

“Things you want to see?”

I followed Yuni.

The place Yuni went to was a small market.

Not a place with luxury items, but a cheap street market.

Is there some kind of romance to this place?

“Senior! Look at this! Fish!”

“My, what a pretty lady. Miss! I’ll give you a discount, buy some!”

“Really? Senior! He said he’ll give us a discount!”

“What are you going to do with it?”

“Umm… Maybe it’ll be useful somewhere?”

“No, it won’t. Let’s go. Sorry, hope you sell a lot.”

“Eh~~.”

I led Yuni away to another spot.

As we moved, Yuni’s eyes sparkled.

She looked at everything in the market as if it were fascinating.

“Is this your first time here?”

“Yes, what would I have to do here? Have you been here before, senior?”

“……Maybe once?”

This was my second time visiting the market, as I usually went to the same places.

I had been attending the academy for two years, but every day had been busy.

I think the last time I came to the market was to buy a birthday gift for Luna.

I’m pretty sure I bought a robe.

Which Rie ended up burning in a joint exercise…

“Senior! Look at this! This!”

“Yeah, yeah.”

While I was pondering, Yuni might have interpreted my response as disinterest because she quickly moved on to looking at other things.

Yuni, excited, pulled on my sleeve.

“Senior, please buy this!”

Yuni pointed at some skewers in front of us.

They were skewers emitting a pleasant aroma.

Normally, I would happily buy them, but…

“Hey, we’re going to eat later. If you eat that now, you’ll be too full for dinner.”

“Eh~. That’s not how it works. That’s that, and this is this.”

I narrowed my eyes and looked at Yuni, then licked my lips.

“Two, please.”

“Thank you!”

I bought two skewers and handed one to Yuni.

“What’s this? You say that and yet you’re eating, senior.”

“I’m fine. I was worried because you don’t eat much.”

“I could eat a lot if I really wanted to.”

“Sure, you could.”

I bit into the skewer.

The sweet sauce soaked into my taste buds.

“Delicious, isn’t it?”

“Is it?”

At my words, Yuni took a big bite of her skewer.

“Mmm!!! Delicious! Is this what commoners eat?”

Yuni exclaimed in admiration as she continued eating her skewer, which disappeared in no time.

“Let’s try other things too! More!”

“……”

Aren’t we really going to miss our dinner at this rate?

I was worried since we had made a reservation at a restaurant by paying 20 times the original price.

But thinking that Yuni might not have this kind of experience again, I started buying all the food she wanted.

“Senior, this too! And this!”

“Got it. Here you are.”

I paid for everything Yuni wanted.

"……Hmm?"

In the midst of this, I sensed a strange presence from an alleyway nearby.

I saw a person in a hood looking at us and then hiding deeper into the alley.

I laughed at the sight.

Looks like they've come.

"Senior!"

"Ah, okay."

I smiled and moved back towards Yuni.

---

"……Senior, I can't eat a single thing."

"You said you could eat. Force it down."

"If I eat all this, I might actually die."

I sighed.

Yuni only nibbled at the appetizers and left the rest of the food untouched.

We had eaten too much at the market.

"And it doesn't taste good. I was so looking forward to it because I heard it was delicious."

"When you're that full, nothing tastes good."

I said, shoveling the food into my mouth half-heartedly.

I was quite full too, but leaving all the food felt rude, so I was stuffing it into my stomach.

“Senior, are you a pig? How can you eat all that and still eat more?”

“……I’m so full I could die, but I’m forcing it down.”

“Why? Let’s just leave if we’re full!”

“Right, let’s do that.”

Even the smell of food was becoming unbearable. Apologies to the chef, but leaving the food seemed like the right thing to do.

Although we couldn’t eat much, I made sure to thank the chef before we left.

Yuni and I then left the restaurant without having properly eaten.

Outside, the sun was setting, casting shadows everywhere.

I escorted Yuni to the front of the academy.

As we arrived near the academy, Yuni walked ahead with her hands clasped behind her back, then suddenly spun around to face me.

“Senior, today was really fun.”

Yuni said with a bright smile, which made me smile too.

“As long as you had fun.”

Hearing my response, Yuni grinned mischievously.

“So, can I tell you my wish now?”

At this, I chuckled.

I had somewhat expected this, given that she hadn’t answered when I told her to mention her wish earlier.

“Go ahead, tell me.”

As I readily encouraged her, Yuni wrinkled her nose.

“Eh, what’s this? You’re supposed to get angry and say, ‘That wasn’t your wish?’“

Yuni mimicking my voice somehow felt cute to me.

I put on a conceited smile to tease her.

“I’ve already figured out all your moves.”

“Ah, no fun. Then I’ll have to try harder to be unpredictable.”

“Do that. So, what is your wish?”

“My wish?”

Yuni stepped closer to me with her hands clasped behind her back.

“Senior, I like you. Will you go out with me?”

Yuni said this with a playful expression.

“Is that your wish?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

How many times have I heard those words?

It’s been the same since I became the student council president.

What kind of joke is she trying to pull this time…

“But this is real.”

“……What?”

“I really do like you, senior.”

“……”

Just minutes after claiming I had figured out her actions and wouldn’t be surprised, I was faced with the most startling confession.

“You…”

“I know. My sister likes you too~ Luna senior likes you, and Astina likes you. I know I have three competitors.”

Yuni took a step back and smiled brightly.

“Even so? I like you, senior. Now that I’ve got a wish, why not give it a try?”

“……”

“But, I don’t think this feeling will change. It’s been a while since I started feeling this way. At first, I thought it was just a crush, but it’s not. I just really like you, senior. A lot.”

“Yuni.”

“So, I told my sister. Now she and I are competitors. I might give up the throne, but I didn’t want to give up on Rudy.

But now, I’m equal to my sister. I’ve been everywhere she went with you. And starting today, we’re dating, right?”

Yuni said this and waved at me.

“Ah! It’s gotten quite late. I might miss the dorm curfew. So, starting today, is it day one? Senior?”

With those words, Yuni ran towards the academy.

It was too dark to see clearly, but I felt like Yuni’s face was flushed red.

“……”

I blankly stared at the place where Yuni disappeared.

Rie, Luna, Astina… and now Yuni…

I took a deep breath.

Right, what can I do?

Once all this is over…

I somewhat collected my thoughts and looked behind me.

“Come out now. There’s no one here.”

A woman in a hood emerged from the darkness.

“Did I come at a bad time?”

“Well, yes. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to turn back, does it?”

The woman lifted her hood and looked in my direction.

Or rather, she turned her head towards me.

She couldn’t see in front of her because a black cloth covered her eyes.

It was Saint Haruna.

“Then let’s talk.”

Haruna said with a smile.

# CHAPTER 272
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (5)

Haruna and I moved to a place where we wouldn't run into other people.

"Have you been well?"

Haruna asked with a smile.

"I'm not sure if I've been well. I've been swamped with work."

"Is that so? That's unfortunate. But,"

Haruna's expression suddenly turned fierce, glaring at me menacingly.

"Why didn't you take over as the head of the family?"

To which, I responded with a question.

"Was it you who passed the information to Professor Robert?"

"You were supposed to inherit the family, weren't you?"

"I'll ask again. Did you push Professor Robert into a corner?"

Our conversation stalled.

Haruna sighed.

"Let's have a proper conversation."

"If you answer my question, I'll answer yours."

I wasn't planning to back down.

If someone had sacrificed those around me once, it meant they could do it again.

Having such a person around meant that people close to me could start disappearing one by one.

I was not willing to tolerate such a situation.

“I regret what happened to Professor Robert.”

“Regrets or whatever. Did you do it?”

Haruna nodded.

“Yes.”

Clench.

I gritted my teeth.

“You… You drove Professor Robert to…”

“If I hadn’t spoken to Professor Robert, you would be dead.”

“Weren’t there other ways? You could have told me about it, or prevented this situation altogether.”

“There was no other way for this one.”

“So you’re saying that Professor Robert had to die?”

“Yes.”

She was firm.

That only fueled my anger further.

“Professor Robert! What did Professor Robert do wrong? All I had to do was become stronger, tell me the future properly. How could you just…”

“Have you heard of the butterfly effect?”

“…The butterfly effect?”

“A small butterfly’s wings might cause a faraway storm. Aren’t you afraid of the things that could happen if I told you the future and took different actions?”

“So, you’re saying you didn’t intervene to cause Professor Robert’s death?”

“It was the way to minimize the shock. And I didn’t force him to sacrifice. The choice was Robert’s.”

“Choice?”

I was puzzled.

What had Haruna done to Professor Robert?

“All I did was show Professor Robert the past and the future. And the decision he made was his sacrifice.”

I narrowed my brows.

According to Haruna, she hadn’t asked Robert to sacrifice himself.

The sacrifice was entirely Robert’s decision.

But does that make it okay?

Haruna had read the future and knew that Robert would make such a decision.

She had led Robert to that decision.

“So you’re saying you’re not at fault?”

“If we’re talking about fault, then yes, it’s my fault. However, it was a necessary action.”

“A necessary action?”

“Astina. Saving her changed many futures. Your growth was delayed, and the overall situation changed.”

I clenched my fist.

“Then let me ask you. Has everything gone according to plan now?”

“If you hadn’t given up your position as the head of the family, it would have.”

“So you’re saying that if I had taken the position as the head of the family, everything would be resolved? We could defeat Aryandor, no one would die, and we could peacefully conclude everything?”

“…”

Haruna couldn’t answer my question.

Robert’s last words.

Haruna didn’t know all futures.

Just because she could see the future didn’t mean she could control it.

She might change the lives of individuals, but changing the whole world was impossible.

Still, I didn’t think it was right to blame Haruna for Robert’s death.

Although she had forced Robert’s sacrifice, the crime wasn’t hers alone.

The real cause of Robert’s death was the rebels, not Haruna.

“Haruna, I remember that you helped us. If you hadn’t come to the academy, it would have been hard for Rie, Yuni, and also Astina to survive.”

That was why I was having this conversation.

Haruna had indeed helped us a lot.

She had helped at the academy, and by informing us about Astina’s death, Astina was able to live.

I am truly grateful for this.

But it was difficult to accept the death of others.

“I will do my best to change someone’s death. But don’t induce someone’s death.”

“I’m sorry.”

Haruna bowed her head to me.

I sighed.

If the professor were here, he’d probably laugh it off, saying, ‘Why fuss over such nonsense?’

I didn’t scold her further.

“So, why are you here?”

Haruna looked up at me, puzzled.

“You must have a reason for coming.”

“Ah… It’s about the position as head of the family.”

“The position as head of the family?”

Haruna’s puzzled look disappeared, replaced by a serious expression.

“Aren’t you looking for Chancellor Ophillius?”

I nodded.

The reason I didn’t accept the position as head and came to the academy was to draw Haruna here.

“Chancellor Ophillius is probably already dead.”

“What?”

“That’s the future. And Aryandor will absorb his time magic, gaining even greater power. By that time, you won’t be able to stop Aryandor either.”

“So you’re saying if I take the position as head, I can stop him?”

“Yes, because then your family’s spatial magic will be completely yours.”

Aryandor, having absorbed the entirety of time magic, posed a significant threat.

To face him, one must possess the entirety of spatial magic.

“So, are you certain that Chancellor Ophillius is dead? Not in the future you saw, but in this reality.”

“I can’t be sure. Anyway, about the spatial magic…”

“Then, in the future you saw, where is Chancellor Ophillius?”

“What?”

“If Chancellor Ophillius is alive, then it doesn’t matter. That means I can also face Aryandor.”

“But Chancellor Ophillius is…”

“This situation isn’t from the future you saw, right? Then that future could have changed as well.”

Chancellor Ophillius.

I don’t know much about him.

However, I don’t think he’s the type to give up easily.

He was someone who carried the weight of many people on his shoulders.

He never passed his burden to others.

He was someone who bore it alone and moved forward.

“Where is Chancellor Ophillius now?”

---

“Ha… Ha…”

Chancellor Ophillius had died countless times.

Well over a hundred times.

He had died so many times that it was hard to keep count, and his mind wasn't clear anymore.

"How about giving up now?"

Aryandor came again to kill Ophillius.

Ophillius stared blankly at his sword.

Perhaps dying this time would bring some relief.

Ophillius kept waiting.

He waited only for Rudy or Ian to return.

Yet, they never came.

Something went wrong.

Aryandor laughed at such an expression on Ophillius's face.

"Do you finally sense something is wrong?"

"How… What happened?"

"Ophillius, do you know where you are?"

"Where…?"

Ophillius looked around.

It was the same place he had been seeing.

His mansion.

Nothing was unusual.

Aryandor slowly approached the window.

Then, he drew the hanging curtains aside.

That's when the dim outside scenery was revealed.

Buildings in ruins and streets devoid of people.

"…Ephomos."

This was the destroyed city beneath the capital, Ephomos.

"It took quite an effort to build a mansion identical to yours here."

"How… How am I here…?"

"Do you know where this place is?"

"Place?"

"The place where you and I first met. Where you saved me, that place."

Before Ophillius could use his time magic, Aryandor had already cast his magic.

Thus, he moved the space.

To the place where they first met in the past.

Ophillius hadn't noticed.

Not using time magic much, Ophillius had become dull to such sensations.

"So, what will you do now? Plan to hold out as long as you can?"

Aryandor lifted his sword with a smile.

In a situation of despair, people feel more disheartened when they fall into an abyss from a hopeful situation than when despair arrives without any warning.

Ophillius was no different in this respect.

He knew there was a possibility someone could come to save him, but those people couldn't reach this place.

No one would expect it.

If they realized he had been moved through spatial magic, they would search the rebels' stronghold, not thinking to look right beneath the capital.

"It's darkest under the lampshade," they say, not realizing it was right under the capital.

"Heh…"

Ophillius let out a hollow laugh.

"So, how about dying now?"

"Yeah… That seems to be the only way."

Ophillius stood up as he spoke.

At this, Aryandor's lips curled into a smile.

"Good decision. Then, let's proceed with the magic…"

"But."

Ophillius felt despair.

But he hadn't given up.

"I have no intention of giving you power."

"What?"

Ophillius mobilized his mana.

"I must pay for my sins."

Ophillius made a vow.

To someone who knew his past, to Robert, he had promised.

He had vowed never to die.

Ophillius had committed many sins.

He had tried to change the future by committing those sins.

All those attempts were in vain.

Seeing now that Aryandor knew about his sister, Beatrice, it was indeed the worst situation.

Ophillius, trying to bring about the best situation, had led it to the worst.

“Ugh… You bastard!”

Ophillius’s body began to fluctuate.

Time twisted.

“Aryandor, I’m sorry. I wished you could have lived a better life.”

It was Ophillius who taught Aryandor swordsmanship.

It was Ophillius who taught him time magic.

Would it have been better if he hadn’t taught him those things from the start?

Would it have been better if he had told him about his sister, Beatrice?

Would the situation have been better if he hadn’t killed Serina’s mother and sealed Priscilla?

Or, if he hadn’t killed Robert’s son…

Many thoughts crossed Ophillius’s mind.

But now, he couldn’t change the past.

The only thing humans can change is the future.

“Let me say one last thing.”

A fluctuating door opened on Ophillius’s side.

He was heading to a rift in time.

A place where space, time, or anything else does not exist.

If he went there, he could preserve his life.

However, he couldn’t escape from there.

He would have to stay there quietly until his lifespan ended.

This would undoubtedly be painful.

But he couldn’t die here.

He slowly walked into the rift in time.

As Ophillius walked toward that place, he turned back and smiled.

“Aryandor, live your life.”

“Ophillius!!!!!!”

And so, Ophillius disappeared into the rift in time.

# CHAPTER 273
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (6)

“Where are we?”

“On the way to Ephomos.”

Haruna and I quickly moved towards the capital.

The way here wasn’t difficult.

“We need to hide well here. If anyone comes, just say my name.”

“Understood.”

I was able to come here by utilizing the Red Dragon, Yongyong.

I wondered why it was named so, but since Evan decided on it, I just let it go.

“But, is this the only way in?”

We were outside the capital.

In front of the castle was a strange cave.

“There is a way in from the capital, but we can’t actually enter the capital, can we?”

“Into the capital?”

I quickly realized the reason.

There were checkpoints to enter the capital now.

The checkpoints in place to capture Perrian Astria were still in operation.

Haruna couldn’t enter the castle like this.

She was currently doing her best to hide her appearance.

The reason I went to the Academy was to create a situation where Haruna could reveal herself safely.

The Academy was a more troublesome place for the rebels than the capital.

The capital, being such a large castle, was difficult to manage every part of it.

On the other hand, the Academy was smaller, and with McDowell and Cromwell vigilantly watching, the rebels couldn't just come as they pleased.

"How far do we have to go?"

"We'll be there soon."

We walked deep into the cave.

It seemed endless, but soon we could see the end.

"…It's blocked?"

The problem was that the end was blocked.

I looked at Haruna puzzledly.

"You have to break through."

"Break through?"

"With Ephomos gone, they blocked the entrance completely, so you have to break through to get inside."

I looked at the ceiling.

Using great force in the cave could bring the ceiling down…

It was hard to know how much it was blocked, so precise control of power was necessary.

I touched my chin and then the wall.

“Can you break through?”

“…It seems a bit much to force our way through.”

Punching through could definitely bring the ceiling down.

Then there was an option.

To use spatial magic to break through.

That also carried its risks.

Using Spatial Severance might touch something important and cause damage.

So…

“Behemoth.”

I had Behemoth, a demon of earth and metal.

Although it looked like an elephant, it was quite useful.

“Pwoo!!!”

Thump!

When I summoned Behemoth, suddenly a large body appeared.

“What, what’s this!”

Certainly, when I summoned Behemoth before, its body was very small.

It was about the size of my waist before, but now it was bigger than my body.

The large body of Behemoth filled the cave, rumbling ominously.

As its body touched the ceiling, the cave started to resonate.

I quickly slapped Behemoth's body, urging it to shrink.

"Hey! Hey! Shrink your body! Do it quickly!"

"Pooh?"

Behemoth tilted its head but began to gradually reduce its size.

As Behemoth shrank to about the size of my waist, the ceiling stabilized to its original state.

That was a close call… We could have been crushed under the cave.

I looked at Behemoth, my heart still racing.

"Hey! Keep your size like this normally. Unless I say otherwise, maintain this state."

"Pooh…"

Behemoth seemed somewhat displeased.

Ignoring that, I pointed towards the blocked path.

"Can you break through that?"

"Pooh!"

Behemoth moved its trunk, and the wall in front of us started to wobble.

The stone, which appeared solid, turned to mud, and a path began to open.

After a few minutes, a clear path was opened.

"Let's go."

"Understood."

I led Behemoth and Haruna forward.

A few steps ahead, a remarkable sight unfolded.

An underground city.

Yet, a destroyed one.

That was exactly the vibe.

All the buildings were destroyed, and not a single person was in sight.

“…But what is that?”

In this ruined city, one house stood out as discordant.

A house built in the center of the city.

While all other houses were destroyed, this one remained intact.

At the same time, an unsettling feeling emanated from it.

Time magic.

Time magic was being used there.

“Haruna, stay here. I’ll leave Behemoth with you.”

Haruna wasn’t combat-ready.

If Aryandor was there, he wouldn’t leave Haruna alone.

It seemed right for me to go there alone.

“Understood.”

Leaving Haruna behind, I ran towards that place.

Arriving at the front of the house, I cautiously opened the door and entered.

“Huh?”

I was puzzled.

Entering through the door, I saw a familiar sight.

"…The Ophillius mansion?"

The house was built exactly like the Ophillius mansion.

Then, the truth of the situation dawned on me.

I quickly ran upstairs.

The bedroom was where time magic had been used in the Ophillius mansion.

So, if I go to the bedroom…

I opened the door to the bedroom on the second floor.

There was a man inside.

A man looking into the void, seemingly in despair.

It was Aryandor.

As I entered, Aryandor turned his head.

I immediately mobilized my mana.

However, Aryandor showed little reaction.

"It's already too late."

"What?"

Ophillius is nowhere to be seen.

Nor is there his corpse.

"What have you done?"

Aryandor said nothing.

He just walked towards the window.

“You can’t escape.”

Aryandor looked at me blankly, then laughed.

“You think you can stop me?”

“There’s nothing I can’t stop.”

He’s someone I’ve already fought once.

If a fight broke out here, and if Haruna saw and asked for help, I might be able to capture him.

The problem was figuring out the current situation.

Where did Chancellor Ophillius go? Did Aryandor kill him?

If so, his power…

According to Haruna, Aryandor, having obtained all time magic, is now beyond my reach.

But handling new power requires time to adapt.

If I don’t give him that time…

Aryandor looked at me and then spoke.

“Rudy Astria.”

“…?”

“Do you have any interest in making a deal with me?”

“What?”

Is this guy insane?

A deal?

I almost cursed out loud but held it back.

“What kind of deal?”

I thought I might as well hear him out.

Perhaps he’s had a change of heart.

“I’ll send you back to the world you originally came from.”

“What?”

“You know this isn’t the world you were in. Essentially, you were brought here against your will. So, I’m saying I’ll send you back to where you originally were.”

“Are you crazy?”

I couldn’t hold back my curse at his words.

This guy must have really lost it.

“I know how to send you back to your original world.”

“I know that, as*hole.”

Clearly, in the future, I used spatial magic to return to my original world.

So, wouldn’t I find out how after this is all over?

“No, you don’t.”

Aryandor said with a flat, emotionless gaze.

He looked like a real madman talking like that.

“What’s the method then?”

At my casual question, Aryandor answered easily.

“Every user of time, space, and dimensional magic except for one must die. The one remaining will have the power to travel dimensions.”

“Ah?”

My eyes widened.

All users of time, space, and dimensional magic must die?

Then, the future me…

I started to understand the situation.

By that time, everyone was dead.

Aryandor, Haruna.

That’s why I was able to move.

“So, you’re saying you’ll die?”

“Yes. I’ll make sure to die.”

“…”

In exchange for me returning to my original world, Aryandor dies.

Is this the right choice?

If I choose this option, everything ends.

This confusing situation, the danger to everyone.

“What do you think? Will you accept my offer?”

“Hmm…”

I looked at Aryandor.

…It wasn’t going to be that simple.

I smirked.

“F*ck off.”

There’s no way this guy would make such a tempting offer, and I had no intention of killing Ian and Haruna.

I’d welcome his own suicide with open arms, but this obviously looks like a trap.

“Spatial Severance.”

Aryandor twisted his body to dodge my magic.

“Hmm… Don’t you want to hear the whole story before deciding?”

“Do you think I’d trust you?”

I’ve seen the end of those who’ve cooperated with this guy.

He discarded his own leaders like trash and even killed Perrian, his ally.

Would he really cooperate with me, his enemy?

Unless I was a fool, I wouldn’t accept such an offer.

Aryandor looked genuinely puzzled.

“Once you return to your world, what happens to this one doesn’t matter to you, does it?”

“Whether I return or not isn’t the issue. It’s blatantly obvious you’ll betray me. Hey, how about I make you an offer? If you die right here, I’ll accept your proposal. So, will you die?”

When I said that, Aryandor smirked.

“But, I was actually serious about the offer.”

“Then die for me.”

“That’s problematic. There are still a few things I need to do.”

I flipped Aryandor off.

“Then f*ck off. I’ll kill you without sacrificing anyone.”

“Sure, give it a try. I’ll cheer you on.”

Aryandor responded mockingly and manipulated his mana.

His surroundings fluctuated.

“Time magic… Priscilla!”

“You still can’t block time magic, can you?”

Aryandor was mocking me.

“Rudy.”

“Priscilla.”

I focused on Aryandor’s form.

I just need to use the same sense of technique as before.

The sense of freezing space.

The feeling of making it immovable.

Remember that feeling.

“See you on the battlefield, Rudy Astria.”

“Ugh…!”

I align my senses with Priscilla.

I show Priscilla the domain of space.

So, the movement of space…!

“Take care.”

Then, Aryandor’s form disappeared.

“…Shit.”

I cursed and looked at the place where Aryandor had vanished.

Well… If it were that easy, I would’ve gone straight to the rebels…

Not being able to suppress that technique is why I can’t defeat the rebels.

I sighed.

---

The rebel’s headquarters.

As Aryandor arrived, the necromancer, Daemon, approached him.

“Have you returned?”

“Yes.”

Daemon followed Aryandor and began to speak.

“There’s a lot that has piled up.”

“Is that so.”

Aryandor listened to Daemon’s story with indifference.

“Raven has been captured…”

Aryandor showed no interest in Daemon’s words.

He had other concerns.

‘He’s starting to be able to use it.’

He looked at his hand.

He had just returned to this place using time magic.

But it wasn’t easy.

Rudy’s attempt to block the time magic had worked to some extent.

He had tried to use time magic to return to the rebel’s headquarters, but he ended up somewhere completely unrelated.

Although he hadn’t completely blocked the magic, he had succeeded in partially suppressing it.

‘If this drags on any longer… ‘

It meant defeat.

The rebels no longer had the upper hand.

“Aryandor?”

At Daemon’s call, Aryandor turned his head.

“There are many issues internally as well…”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“…What?”

Aryandor stood up.

‘Aryandor, live your own life.’

Aryandor pondered the last words of Ophillius.

His answer was already decided.

‘This is my life.’

Aryandor looked at Daemon and spoke.

“Prepare for war.”

At those words, Daemon’s eyes widened.

“War?”

“Before Rudy Astria masters his abilities. We will go to war.”

Aryandor spoke with a murderous look in his eyes.

# CHAPTER 274
# SAINT HARUNA 2 (7)

After letting Aryandor get away, I returned to where Haruna was.

As soon as Haruna saw me, she ran towards me.

“What happened? What about Chancellor Ophillius…?”

“The Chancellor wasn’t there. I have no clue what happened.”

“He wasn’t there?”

“Yes, only Aryandor was there.”

If Ophillius had been killed by Aryandor, there would have been some trace of it.

Either his body or signs of a struggle.

But there was nothing there.

Not even a trace of Ophillius’s blood existed.

It was also impossible to know what had happened there.

Time magic had been used so extensively that it was hard to tell how it was used.

“Was there… anything else strange?”

“He said something odd.”

I explained to Haruna what had happened.

About the method to return to our original world and that Aryandor had suggested it.

Haruna listened closely to the story, then sat down.

“Could you wait a moment, please?”

“What is it?”

Haruna didn’t answer my question and closed her eyes.

Then, an unknown power began to emanate from her body.

I could instinctively recognize the energy.

“…Dimensional magic?”

After a while, Haruna stood up.

“What did you do?”

“I looked into what happened.”

“Is that even possible?”

“Not completely, but to some extent, yes.”

“So, what happened? What about Chancellor Ophillius?”

Haruna hesitated before speaking.

“I don’t know if it’s good news… or if it’s regrettable…”

“Hm?”

“Chancellor Ophillius is not dead.”

“He’s not dead?”

“But, he’s in a state as good as dead.”

What does that mean?

As I looked puzzled, Haruna stood up.

“There exist gaps in the world. In time, in space, in dimensions. There are gaps.”

“Gaps?”

“Our world seems interconnected, but it’s actually not. We only see and live in the connected parts.”

“So, what does that have to do with anything?”

“Chancellor Ophillius has headed towards that gap.”

“So…”

“He might be alive, but in a state that’s not truly living. As I just said, we can only live in a continuous world. Entering such a disconnected place would render him in a state of being both existent and non-existent.”

Being existent and non-existent.

It was a contradictory statement, but I understood what it meant.

“Did he make that choice not to pass his power to Aryandor?”

“From what I’ve seen, yes.”

I had a mixed expression on my face.

Should I call it fortunate or not…

If you asked me whether Ophillius was a good person, I couldn’t answer.

He was a user of time magic, and the fact that he had raised Aryandor remained unchanged.

I didn’t know much about Ophillius.

What he had done in his life, or what his relationship with Aryandor was, I had no idea.

I wondered.

Who exactly was Ophillius?

What kind of life had he led?

“Haruna.”

“Yes?”

“Tell me about Chancellor Ophillius. It’s time I knew. What exactly is Aryandor trying to do, and what’s the relationship between Ophillius and Aryandor?”

“It’s going to be quite a long story.”

“That’s fine. It’s a story I need to hear at some point.”

That’s how I began to hear the story from Haruna.

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The Royal Palace.

High-ranking nobles gathered, and even the Emperor and Rie were present.

Among those people, Ian Astria stood at the center.

“Let’s begin the appointment ceremony.”

Rudy had announced Ophillius’s death, and the date of the ceremony had been moved up.

Leaving the ducal position of the Empire vacant for too long wouldn’t be beneficial.

Quickly seating Ian in the ducal position was necessary to stabilize the empire’s public sentiment and to respond to the rebels.

The Emperor descended from his high seat and picked up the prepared crown.

“Ian Astria is hereby recognized as the head of the Astria family.”

Though the appointment ceremony usually required several steps, the situation of the Empire necessitated a simplified process.

As the Emperor placed the crown on Ian, the surrounding nobles applauded.

The nobles clapped their hands and murmured among themselves.

“So, what happens to the empire now?”

“With Chancellor Ophillius dead, is it the era of the Noble faction?”

Those of the Nobles faction smiled, and those of the Royal faction trembled with anxiety.

With one of the two dukes gone, it was thought that the balance of power would tilt towards the Noble faction.

“Khh…”

“Finally…”

It was time for Ian to receive the crown and speak.

He stood in front of the nobles, looking around.

“I’ve gone through many processes to get to this position. I received help from many nobles along the way, and I have no intention of forgetting this assistance.”

The words made the Noble faction’s corners of their mouths rise.

It sounded to them as if he was promising to repay the Noble faction.

However, that smile didn’t last long.

“But now is not the time for us to fight each other. Noble faction and the Royal faction, we don’t have the time to worry about such things. We have a very dangerous enemy before us. The rebels. We must stand against them.”

“What is he talking about?”

“Stand against the rebels…?”

The Nobles faction looked at Ian with puzzled eyes.

“I will not distinguish between the Noble and the Royal faction. I will give positions and rewards according to people’s abilities and will no longer allow factional fighting.

“If there’s factional fighting, I will not stand idly by.”

Those words were a shock to the Nobles faction.

They had thought it would be their era, but Ian had no intention of supporting the Nobles faction.

“I believe the reason such rebels could emerge is because of the rotten nobility. Therefore, I will take this opportunity to cut out the rotten parts and right the Empire.”

With those words, Ian’s speech came to an end.

The nobles murmured among themselves, but Ian didn’t care about that.

Anyone who couldn’t agree with his words was no better than trash.

There was no reason for someone with proper abilities to disagree with Ian, whether they were part of the Royal faction or the Noble faction, whether they came from a good family or not, whether they had flattered Ian or not.

If they had abilities, they could hold important positions.

This way, he could attract all the talents.

And they would do their best to show their capabilities.

To reach higher positions.

To achieve better results.

Ian finished his speech and walked alone through the corridor.

While walking, he entered a room in the palace.

“Did I do it right, Rudy Astria?”

“It was good.”

Rudy was there.

“It seems the political situation will flow as you desire.”

“It’s not just what I want, is it?”

The reason Ian had given such a speech was because of a deal with Rudy.

Rudy had offered a deal in exchange for giving up his position as head of the family.

Initially, Ian refused the deal.

Not because he disliked the deal, but because he wanted to compete on equal footing.

He didn’t want to be seen as someone who cowardly took the ducal position due to his brother’s concession.

He wanted to compete fairly and become the duke.

However, Rudy was firm.

By giving up his position as head, he would not only bring Haruna into play but also found it better to move freely rather than being tied to the ducal position to counter the rebels.

Only after explaining that giving up the ducal title was not out of consideration for Ian but for a better outcome did the deal go through.

Of course, the contents of the deal were minimal.

Getting to keep using spatial magic and help with a few tasks.

It was practically a request to maintain the status quo.

After discussing with Rudy for a while, Ian casually asked.

“So, what’s next?”

“First, we plan to examine the magical artifacts we’ve collected.”

“Magical artifacts?”

“Ah, those magical engineering items.”

He was referring to the item attached to Raven’s head.

“You’re going to investigate it?”

“Yes, Luna is currently trying to dismantle and examine the device, but we’re not sure what we’ll find.”

Ian looked intently at Rudy.

“Did you hear something from Haruna?”

“Yes, to some extent.”

Rudy had heard about the past from Haruna.

Of course, it wasn’t the exact details.

Haruna didn’t know the entire past either.

She had only heard a vague outline.

“I’ll explain everything once I know the details.”

“Alright, then take care.”

Rudy stood up and left the room, and Ian watched his back as he left.

Although Ian had secured the ducal position, Rudy seemed to be at a higher place than himself.

“I thought there was nothing above the ducal position…”

Ian chuckled to himself.

He had succeeded in securing the ducal position, but there was no time to be satisfied or enjoy it.

He had to strive harder.

To not be lesser than his younger brother, he had to move forward.

“It’s going to be busy for a while.”

Ian gathered his things casually and stood up from his seat.

# CHAPTER 275
# BEATRICE (1)

“Luna, have you been well?”

“Yes! Rudy, you’ve been well too, right?”

I went to the Magic Tower to greet Luna.

Then, Franz, the Empire’s head wizard, walked up from behind.

“Rudy’s here?”

“How have you been?”

“Would an old man’s life suddenly change? As usual, I’ve been busy with my research. Now, take a seat.”

Franz extended his hand towards a chair in front.

I sat down and looked at the table in front of me.

I had been curious about it since earlier.

The snacks laid out on this table.

“…What’s all this?”

“Ha, just some snacks. Prepared them for you to enjoy with tea.”

Franz spoke as if it was nothing, but the snacks in front of us were not just any ordinary level.

They were almost like something you’d see at a party.

Cookies and cakes piled up like Towers, almost overwhelming in their abundance.

And they were not cheap snacks either.

At a glance, they were obviously from a high-end bakery.

“Help yourself.”

Franz said with a hearty laugh.

What is this old man thinking?

Franz, who could be considered the owner of the Magic Tower, was treating me.

“I don’t particularly enjoy sweets…”

“Is that so? Then, do you prefer snacks that aren’t sweet? Do you have a favorite bakery?”

“No, I don’t particularly enjoy snacks in general. Just a cup of tea would be…”

Then Franz turned his head towards the door.

“Is someone out there?”

“Yes! Master of the Tower!”

As if he had been waiting, a man entered.

“Bring out the finest tea in the Tower!”

“Understood!”

The man quickly moved out, closing the door behind him.

I smiled awkwardly at his attitude.

It was puzzling to be welcomed this warmly when I was no longer the heir to Astria.

It had been strange from the beginning.

When I tried to enter the Magic Tower, the guards greeted me with respect.

Every wizard I met greeted me with a smile.

Now, when there's no benefit to be had from me…

"By the way, you came to see the item Ian passed on to you, didn't you?"

I nodded vigorously.

Talking about work was more comfortable than continuing in this awkward situation.

"Is the analysis finished?"

"It's not finished, but you'll be able to get the information you want. Someone who has seen it in use is here, so analyzing the information should be easy."

"Can we go see it right away?"

"Let's. It's better to finish work and then rest."

Following Franz's words, we stood up from our seats.

As we were moving, I pulled Luna to my side.

"…Huh? Rudy?"

"Luna, what's going on?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why are they all doing this to me?"

I looked around.

The wizards around me smiled brightly at me, as if they were welcoming me.

"I don't know…?"

"Really…?"

Luna pondered for a moment, hand on her chin.

Then, clapping her hands, she looked at me.

“Now that I think about it, it is a bit strange.”

“Strange how?”

“People kept giving me snacks and asking about Rudy.”

“About me?”

“Since Rudy is so amazing, I thought it made sense they’d ask me. But now that I think about it, it’s weird.”

“What’s weird?”

“The snacks were too delicious…!”

“You always liked snacks. Didn’t you just eat them because you were hungry?”

“Is, is that so? Anyway, they tasted better than usual!”

“Really…?”

More delicious snacks…

Asking about me and offering tributes to Luna…

Whatever was happening in the Magic Tower, it was clear there was something suspicious going on.

As Luna and I conversed, we quickly arrived at the laboratory.

Franz handed me a report from the lab.

“Here are the documents we’ve researched. They’re well organized, so it should be easy to understand.”

“Thank you.”

I began to skim through the report.

The report speculated not only on the capabilities of the magical device but also on the intentions of the rebels.

What could be done with this magical device, and where they intended to use it.

The details were thoroughly noted.

I quietly recited the contents of the report.

"…A tool that substitutes for the human body."

This magical device could sustain life even if the body disappeared.

As long as the mana stone is replaced, one could live without a body, not dying.

Of course, this doesn't mean one can live forever.

Although the device can substitute for the body, it cannot substitute for the mind.

Over time, the mind would wear out.

While not actual death, it would be close to death.

"Can this device be used to create an army?"

"It's impossible to reach that level. This magical device prevents death but doesn't enhance individual strength. Plus, its weaknesses are clear, so it can't be distributed to soldiers."

"Weaknesses?"

"If the device itself is destroyed or if the person's head is blown off, survival becomes impossible. Also, this device enables 'survival,' not the ability to regenerate the body."

"I see."

I listened to Franz's explanation and looked back at the report.

A tool that can substitute for the human body.

The rebels don't actually need such a device.

Aryandor is a user of time magic.

Venderwood has the ability to heal the body to an almost unlimited extent.

Daemon can utilize corpses with necromancy.

It was clear how this tool could be of use to the others.

Therefore, this tool was not meant for the rebels.

Aryandor's purpose.

Why he incited a rebellion and for what purpose remained a mystery.

I heard about it from Haruna.

His sister, Beatrice, was the former Saint and the one who summoned me.

Aryandor lives for her.

Although she has already vanished and died, Aryandor dedicates everything to her.

The resurrection of Beatrice.

That was Aryandor's ultimate goal.

The methods and intentions behind such a goal were unknown.

Still, knowing his goal provides an advantage in understanding him.

The magical device Raven researched was undoubtedly created for the resurrection of Beatrice.

Two elements are necessary to resurrect someone.

One is the person's body, and the other is their spirit.

Beatrice has died, and it's unknown where her body is.

Given the time since her death, even if her body were found, it wouldn't be in its normal state.

Therefore, something to substitute for her body was needed to resurrect Beatrice.

I was confident this magical device was created to substitute for Beatrice's body.

Then the question arose.

How do they intend to resurrect Beatrice's spirit?

Thinking with modern science in mind, a brain would be necessary to resurrect a spirit.

A person's spirit returns with their brain.

But, is such a thing possible?

Even in modern times, not everything about the brain is understood.

Could replicating a dead person's brain be possible in this world?

In a world of ordinary science, it might be impossible, but here, there is 'magic.'

I pondered slowly.

What magic could be used to replicate a dead person's spirit…

Recovering a dead person's memories is impossible even with necromancy.

Necromancy doesn't actually resurrect the dead but uses their bodies like puppets.

Even with a corpse, it's impossible to revive a person's memories.

"Hmm…"

As I furrowed my brows in thought, Luna looked at me with concern.

“Is something wrong?”

“It’s nothing…”

I tried to say it was nothing.

Luna glared at me as I spoke.

“You always say it’s nothing.”

“Cough…”

“I know there’s something bothering you.”

Luna said this and came closer to me.

“So, let’s think about it together. I don’t want to pretend I don’t know you’re troubled anymore.”

“…”

“I’ve really become strong. Maybe not as strong as Rudy, but I won’t just fall over with a flick anymore. I’m confident I can survive, no matter who I fight or who attacks me.

“So, let’s think about it together.”

I looked at Luna dumbfoundedly.

While I had been striving and growing, Luna had been growing too.

The once naive and cute Luna was now asking me to rely on her.

“Huh?”

I smiled and placed my hand on Luna’s head.

“Ah! What…! Rudy!”

Then, I tousled her hair vigorously.

Her neatly combed hair became a bit disheveled.

Luna looked at me with surprise.

“Thanks. I’ll explain everything.”

I was grateful to Luna.

Grateful for her saying this and proud of how she had grown.

I took Luna’s hand.

“Ru, Rudy?”

“Let’s talk over dinner.”

I held Luna’s hand and walked out of the laboratory.

“Rudy Astria?”

Franz looked at us puzzledly.

“Ah, thank you for the report. I’m planning to leave now. May I go with Luna?”

“Ah, yes…”

Franz wore a confused look, but I ignored it and walked out.

“Ru, Rudy! People are watching…”

Luna gestured around us.

Other royal wizards opened their eyes wide at us.

I walked through them, taking Luna with me.

“Let them see.”

What if they do?

It didn't matter.

That's how I led Luna out of the Magic Tower.

---

After Rudy left the Magic Tower.

"Head Wizard!!"

Many wizards gathered around Franz.

"Did you see that? Luna and Rudy Astria…"

"I saw it… Hmm…"

"Their relationship seems to be very good. Seeing Rudy leading her…"

"Hmm… I saw it too, I know…"

"Then…! Could it be…!"

Franz shook his head.

"I didn't even get a chance to bring it up."

"Ah…"

"What a missed opportunity…!"

The surrounding wizards exclaimed.

Their plan was to attract Rudy to become a royal wizard.

Rudy was an immense talent.

From his time at the academy to now fighting the rebels, he has shown incredible abilities.

Yet, people only watched him.

After all, he belonged to the Astria family.

But now, it's different.

Rudy has essentially become a free agent, able to join any side.

With such a tremendous talent unaffiliated, now was the opportunity.

The Magic Tower did not miss this timing.

They did their best to appeal to Rudy.

"If the Head Wizard doesn't make an offer, it all means nothing!"

"…Did I know he would leave like that? Still."

"Still?"

"He's Rudy Astria, after all. Do you think he doesn't know why we acted this way?"

Rudy Astria was astute.

Rudy was known to anticipate moves several steps ahead, not just when dealing with the rebels, but also when facing Perrian or Ian.

"So…"

"He's probably assessing the situation. Seeing if we are people who can handle him."

"Oh…"

The wizards nodded at Franz's words, finding them to have a point.

"He's a clever one. We just need to focus on our work. Then Rudy Astria will come to us in his own time."

"Indeed… We will trust and follow the Head Wizard."

"Good."

With that, the wizards returned to their posts, leaving Franz alone.

Cold sweat ran down his back.

'Rudy Astria wouldn't know.'

Franz felt that admitting he missed the timing to speak would diminish his dignity, so he brushed it off.

He knew a lot about Rudy.

There were stories he heard from Robert and things he had seen himself.

Rudy Astria was astute, but there was a screw loose somewhere.

A lack of everyday awareness.

He was strangely oblivious in certain situations.

His gentle nature didn't make it overly apparent, but when you spent time with him, there were moments where things seemed off.

Franz had skirted around the issue to maintain his dignity, but…

"I'll have to make him an offer in person later…"

For now, Franz had managed to sidestep the situation, but if he couldn't get a proper response from Rudy later on, he was sure to catch flak from the others.

So, he planned to make the move later.

# CHAPTER 276
# BEATRICE (2)

“Tell me about Aryandor.”

After losing Aryandor in Ephomos, I asked Haruna.

What does Aryandor want?

What has happened so far, and what will happen in the future?

Haruna explained this to me.

“Aryandor’s goal is the Academy.”

“The Academy?”

“Do you know why Saints appear at the Academy every year?”

The Saints come to the Academy every Homecoming Day.

They don’t come because they have nothing better to do or because they’re idle.

“For the Saints, the Academy is a very important place.”

“So, why is it important?”

“Because it’s the place where a Saint meets her end.”

Haruna answered my question calmly.

“The end…?”

Instead of directly answering my question, Haruna asked another.

“Rudy Astria, haven’t you seen the end of this world when you were somewhere

else?”

I pondered Haruna’s words slowly.

When I saw this world as a game.

It was what she was referring to.

“What was the end of this world like?”

I contemplated for a moment.

The end of this world.

The last scene I saw, in essence.

“The annihilation… of the Academy.”

“Yes, everyone at the Academy dies. But, what happens after that?”

I don’t know what happened next.

The last scene I saw was simply the massacre at the Academy, and then it ended.

Haruna nodded when I didn’t speak.

“That must have been the end.”

What I saw was from Evan’s perspective.

Evan, too, was a part of the Academy. With everyone at the Academy massacred, Evan also died.

So, the last thing I saw was indeed the end.

“However, there is no problem. Aryandor also disappears after seeing that end.”

“What?”

“Aryandor will kill everyone at the Academy and then commit suicide. That’s the end

of the story."

"What are you talking about?"

Aryandor commits suicide?

Why on earth?

I had thought that after defeating the Academy, the next target would naturally be the Empire.

The rebels' goal is essentially the Empire.

They gathered to overthrow the Empire and create a new world.

So, they should have moved towards the Empire for that goal.

"You should know that his purpose does not align with the rebels'."

Aryandor's goal is the resurrection of Beatrice.

He is with the rebels only for that, not sharing the same purpose.

Even so, the rebels' goal cannot be ignored.

Why would he commit suicide after achieving his goal?

It made no sense.

"Aryandor succeeds in resurrecting Beatrice. He uses some power where the Saints meet their end. But, the problem was what happened after Beatrice was resurrected. Beatrice couldn't accept the situation. She couldn't accept a situation where many people had died and many more would have to die."

"So, Aryandor couldn't accept that situation?"

"Exactly. After Beatrice was resurrected, she immediately committed suicide. Aryandor couldn't bear it since the person he sacrificed everything for died right before him."

“So, that’s the end of it.”

“Yes, without Aryandor, the rebels are nothing. They become a group that can be dealt with by the Empire.”

Hearing that, I briefly cocked my head.

“So, can’t we just let Aryandor resurrect Beatrice?”

Essentially, that would bring an end to the whole situation.

The resurrection and eternal life of a person might be taboo according to the Empire, but the lives of those currently living are more important.

The moment we try to stop the rebels, the sacrifice of numerous people becomes inevitable.

So, if we temporarily open the Academy to allow Beatrice’s resurrection…

“If it could be resolved that easily, Rudy wouldn’t have come to this world in the first place.”

“Does that mean that method won’t work?”

“Yes, because this world is completely different from the one Rudy has seen.”

“Of course…”

My arrival must have changed the timeline itself.

No…

Thinking about it felt a bit strange.

The reason I came here.

If such a situation were possible, there would be no reason for me to come.

When I had talked with Haruna before, she had mentioned it was a plan that started from Beatrice’s time.

“This worldline is the worst of them all. It’s the worldline where Beatrice dies before meeting Aryandor, and Aryandor takes on a different purpose.”

---

I walked, recalling the story I had heard from Haruna.

After leaving the Tower with Luna, we entered a restaurant.

Luna looked both bewildered and happy, yet worried at the same time.

“Was it okay for us to leave work? Others will surely think it’s strange… Then, my grades…”

It was currently the first semester of the third year at the Academy, and we were doing field training.

Our performance in the field was evaluated by the people we worked with, and that directly affected our grades.

Luna was conscious of such evaluations.

Seeing Luna like this, I smiled.

“You haven’t been slacking off, so one day off should be fine.”

If those people thought to ruin Luna’s evaluation over this one incident, I would be ready to turn the Tower upside down.

After all the work Luna had done so far…

She had already made significant contributions to the Tower, and considering how fast she processed paperwork, it was clear she had achieved too much to count on fingers.

After all, this field training evaluation was not only important in itself but also in determining what the student would do after graduating from the Academy.

The Tower would surely not want to lose Luna.

To ruin Luna's evaluation in such a scenario?

Would Luna enter the Tower then?

Absolutely not.

For the future, the Tower would surely give Luna a good evaluation.

"Let's take a break today. It's been a while since we had some rest. Both for me and for you."

"Ehehe… It's nice to have a rest with Rudy after so long."

"I feel the same."

"But, weren't you going to explain something to me?"

There was that, too.

"It won't be a long story."

I summarized the story I had heard from Haruna briefly.

The situation we were in and what Aryandor intended to do.

I cut out the deeper details and just recited the main points.

I slowly talked about the things that had happened to me while Luna was away and what needed to happen now.

"Such things…"

Luna furrowed her brow and nodded.

Having said all that, I felt a sort of relief.

The things I knew weren't deep secrets.

But they were also not something I could share with just anyone.

I always kept such matters close to my chest.

These issues were for me to ponder on my own, and I would seek help from others only when necessary.

Even if others knew, they wouldn't be able to offer a proper solution, and their opinions might differ from mine.

However, looking at the situation now, I wondered why I had always kept to myself.

Luna simply listened and empathized.

She didn't offer a solution, just listened.

Yet, my heart felt lighter.

Just by voicing my thoughts, even without finding answers, I felt relieved.

"You've had it tough, Rudy."

Luna said, as if to comfort me.

Hearing her words, I made up my mind.

"And there's something I haven't told you yet."

"Something you haven't told me? Besides everything you've just said?"

"Yes."

Until then, only those involved in the matter like Haruna, Astina, or Aryandor knew about it.

But it was something I eventually had to share with the people around me.

"I am not Rudy Astria."

"Huh?"

Luna cocked her head.

“Not Rudy? Then… is there another Rudy? The Rudy I’ve been seeing and the Rudy in front of me are different people?”

“The me you’ve seen is indeed me, but… it’s complicated to explain. Basically, the original Rudy Astria is a completely different person, and I… entered this body when I came to the Academy.”

“Uh, that’s complicated. So, you’re saying you’re not Rudy, but… the Rudy I know is the real Rudy. Then, you’re the original Rudy now…”

Luna scratched her head, trying to sort it out.

Though her attempt at clarification was more confusing, she wasn’t wrong.

After trying to make sense of it on her own, Luna looked at me.

“So, the Rudy I’ve seen and the Rudy now are the same person, right?”

“That’s correct.”

“Then it doesn’t matter. Whatever the past Rudy was like, the Rudy I know is the Rudy now.”

At Luna’s words, I smiled.

It was just the kind of reaction I expected from Luna.

Even as I anticipated her reaction, a part of me was still unsure, but her expected response brought a smile to my face.

“Thank you.”

“There’s no need for thanks. It’s just obvious.”

I was truly grateful for Luna’s reaction.

She might have said it was obvious, but it wasn’t.

It was only obvious because it was Luna.

I really liked that about Luna.

Clap!

As I finished speaking to some extent, Luna clapped her hands as if to conclude the conversation.

“So, is that everything for today?”

I smiled at Luna’s gesture.

“It looks like it.”

“Then let’s eat to our hearts’ content! Today, we rest as much as we want!”

Luna beamed with a bright smile.

It was a smile that melted away all the fatigue accumulated over time.

“Yeah, let’s enjoy ourselves to the fullest.”

We weren’t at some resort.

We had simply entered an ordinary restaurant and sat down for a quiet meal.

There was nothing else we had to do for the day.

We could think about tomorrow’s tasks, well, tomorrow.

That alone made it a very sweet break for us.

# CHAPTER 277
# BEATRICE (3)

The stronghold of the rebels.

“Daemon, is everything going as planned?”

“Aryandor.”

Daemon raised his head.

He was amidst the corpses, creating new undead.

Aryandor had ordered preparations for war, and Daemon was making all the necessary preparations for this purpose.

“Is there something you need from me? Any orders?”

Daemon asked as he walked out from among the corpses.

Aryandor shook his head in response.

“I came here because I had business. And also, I found myself reminiscing about the old times.”

Daemon and Aryandor did not first meet while forming the rebels.

They first met in Ephomos.

Both were orphans.

Orphans without parents, power, or anything at all—just weak and vulnerable.

Of course, back then, they didn’t know much about each other.

Aryandor was just a street orphan, and Daemon survived by running errands for

necromancers.

Since they lived in different environments, they only knew each other by face.

Their proper meeting was entirely coincidental.

Aryandor was being educated by Ophillius, and Daemon was captured along with the necromancers along by the Astria family.

When they had grown somewhat, they met in the marketplace.

Daemon was out on an errand, and Aryandor was wandering with Ophillius.

Upon discovering Daemon, Aryandor saved him.

More accurately, Ophillius snuck him away.

And together, they started the rebellion.

Daemon looked up at Aryandor.

“By old times, do you mean when we were in Ephomos?”

“Yes.”

Aryandor and Daemon would sometimes talk about their time in Ephomos.

There was always one story that never got left out.

Aryandor would always talk about his sister.

Initially, the identity of this woman was unknown, but recently, he realized Aryandor’s sister was Saint Beatrice.

He had seen the research and its results.

Daemon realized what he was trying to do upon seeing this.

And suddenly, questions began to arise.

When Aryandor first started the rebellion, Daemon thought Aryandor had two goals.

A purpose to change the world and a personal goal for himself.

Back then, he didn't know what the personal goal was, but now he had figured it out.

This revelation brought doubts about whether Aryandor would continue with the rebellion's goal.

If Aryandor's goal was not for the rebellion but for himself, what would happen?

Jefrin died, and Raven died.

One by one, those around them, who had been with them, were dying.

Certainly, sacrifices follow a cause.

If they could achieve what they wanted, such sacrifices could be endured.

But if Aryandor is only thinking of his own objectives…

Daemon quietly looked at Aryandor.

"Anyway, I came here because I have something else to tell you. I will be away for a while."

Daemon furrowed his brow in response.

"Isn't it usual for you to go? Are you planning to be away for a long time?"

"Not for long. And I'm not going anywhere far, just nearby. Just make sure no one can come near that area. In the meantime, you finish preparing for the war."

"…Understood. But may I ask."

"Hm?"

"May I ask what you will be doing?"

Daemon knew what it was about.

Yet, he asked the question.

What exactly is Aryandor going to do?

What kind of task is he going to undertake?

To this, Aryandor replied.

“Preparation. Preparing to end all of this.”

---

“Then, I’ll go.”

With Ian’s words, I looked at Priscilla beside me.

“Priscilla, are you ready?”

“Yes.”

Seeing their response, Ian immediately manipulated his mana.

“Teleport.”

At that, I looked straight at Priscilla.

“Ugh!”

Priscilla let out a grunt, Ian’s figure disappeared and immediately moved to the side.

“…”

“This time, it didn’t work.”

I sighed.

Currently, I am training to control space.

When Aryandor used time magic last time, I failed to block it.

I hadn't trained at all back then, so it couldn't be helped.

But, next time won't be the same.

If I meet Aryandor again, I must not fail.

To ensure that, I am training with Ian.

"Maybe we should take a break."

"Should we?"

My head was throbbing after numerous attempts.

I had forgotten over time, but using Priscilla consumes mental energy.

Now I've gotten somewhat accustomed to it, so I can control it to some extent, but that doesn't mean the mental energy consumption disappears.

Ian walked over to me as I was resting.

"You've somewhat adapted, though."

It's been three days since we started this training.

It's not like there haven't been any results during this time.

I haven't been able to completely block spatial magic, but I've managed to distort the coordinates somewhat.

As we trained, the number of successful attempts increased, but I can't be satisfied with just that.

I need to be able to block it whenever I want.

The problem isn't just distorting the spatial magic; it's how much time it will take to completely block it.

Neither Ian nor I have infinite time.

We don’t know when Aryandor will make his move.

Even if we manage to block Aryandor’s time magic, claiming a perfect victory would be difficult.

Aryandor will surely prepare for me as well.

Even if I can perfectly control my abilities, he will prepare to ensure victory.

I have to work twice as hard as him.

To control his time magic and to surpass his other abilities as well…

“Commander.”

Astina approached the training ground where Ian and I were.

“What is it?”

“A letter from the royal family.”

Astina handed the letter to Ian.

Ian opened the letter and read it slowly.

As he read, his expression grew more distorted.

“Is this all?”

“They left a message saying you should come to the palace once.”

I cocked my head and asked.

“What’s going on?”

“It seems the trash is starting to stir.”

“Trash?”

“Who else? The rotten nobles that have festered and spoiled through and through.”

“Have they made a move?”

Ian’s speech when he rose to the rank of Duke.

He said that regardless of the faction or position, if someone has the ability, they would be placed in a high position.

And if they lack ability, they would be demoted from their current position.

Ian was talking about those individuals.

But was there a need for such an expression?

It was expected that the nobles would rebel.

“After all, we expected this, didn’t we? Just let it be…”

“The problem is, these guys are trying to join the rebels.”

At this, I frowned just like Ian.

“…Rebels?”

“There have already been signs of traitors moving. It looks like others are trying to join them too.”

I already knew there were domains that had joined the rebels.

The domains closer to the center were dealt with by the Royal army or the original forces, but those on the outskirts of the empire had not been sorted out.

It could be seen as a bad situation.

The individuals inside were plotting to betray.

However, discovering this now was rather fortunate.

An internal enemy is always more dangerous than an external one.

Before fighting the rebels, it’s necessary to sort these guys out.

“I should start moving soon. Rudy, what will you do?”

Ian would be away dealing with these individuals.

Without him, I couldn’t train in spatial magic, so I had to cultivate other abilities.

I looked at Astina, who was beside Ian.

“Are you going with him, Astina?”

To this, Astina shook her head.

“I will likely be managing the Royal army.”

“So, you’ll be staying?”

Astina chuckled lightly.

“Are you asking to spar?”

Astina wasn’t just playing around with the Royal army.

In fact, her abilities had likely improved even more than before.

I smiled and rolled up my sleeves.

Now that I can handle spatial magic and Astina has grown, the dynamics of the fight have changed.

It had been a while since my last duel with Astina, so I was somewhat looking forward to it.

“Then…”

Contrary to my expectations, Astina extended her hand as if to tell me to stop.

“Now is not the time.”

“What?”

“What are you, a brawler? Just jumping straight into a spar.”

I wore a puzzled expression at Astina’s words.

Ian casually picked up his things and stood up from his spot.

“Anyway, you two talk it out. I’ll head off first.”

“Ah… Yes. Please go ahead.”

I briefly greeted Ian and then turned my attention back to Astina.

“Do you have something to do?”

“No, my work is almost done. What’s left is mostly minor tasks.”

“So…”

Astina looked at me with a kind smile.

“Do you think we can have a duel in such a cramped place?”

---

“…Where is this?”

I looked around with a confused gaze.

It was a place I had never seen before.

All I could see were trees and stones, and since we flew here with Astina’s magic, it was hard to guess the location.

“It’s just a mountain near the empire.”

Astina, who had finished preparing, was walking towards me.

I was surprised by the sudden change in Astina’s outfit.

“…Did you change here?”

Astina narrowed her eyes and looked at me.

“It’s clothes I was wearing underneath. What are you thinking?”

“You were wearing that underneath?”

Astina was now dressed in a plain tee and short shorts.

Shorts…

She had been wearing a skirt until just now, which meant those were undergarments.

If you didn’t know any better, you’d think they were just ordinary short pants, but knowing they were undergarments…

I suddenly felt embarrassed.

“…What are you staring at!”

“Oh, no, it’s nothing.”

I hastily put on an awkward expression and coughed.

“Anyway, a place like this should allow us to fight properly.”

The sky was open, and there was nobody around.

Even if we used our full power, there was no risk of damaging nearby objects or hurting anyone.

“Can we go all out?”

“Would I have brought us here if I intended to take it easy?”

“If you get hurt, it’s not my fault.”

“Worry about yourself.”

Astina and I smiled and began to manipulate our mana.

# CHAPTER 278
# BEATRICE (4)

Astina moved as soon as she finished speaking.

Mana swirled around her, and I furrowed my brow.

“Rudy, let’s give it a shot,” Astina said with a smile.

“Gravity Field.”

A strong gravity field emerged around us.

Not only the leaves attached to the trees but also the thin branches fell to the ground.

I felt the gravity on my body as well.

My body became heavier, and my legs wouldn’t move.

The force was incomparable to when we had sparred before.

I felt the weight and thought to myself.

She wasn’t planning on going easy.

Then, I didn’t need to go easy either.

Not that I was planning on going easy anyway.

“Behemoth, Priscilla.”

“Whoosh!”

“Huh?”

I summoned both of them right away.

They represented my full power.

Priscilla looked at me with confused eyes.

“What are you trying to do…”

“It’s like a game. Just go with it.”

I stomped on the ground.

Even though Astina’s magic was holding me, moving quickly wasn’t a problem.

Astina stretched her hand towards me as I ran towards her.

“Reverse.”

Then, my body floated up.

Gravity worked in reverse.

Suddenly, I was flying into the air, and Astina moved her mana again.

The ground behind Astina split.

The ground shattered, and rocks flew towards me.

“Behemoth.”

I used Behemoth in response.

Rocks were nothing to me.

With Behemoth, I could manipulate rocks, dirt, and even metal as I wished.

“Whoosh!”

The rocks flying towards me disintegrated with the sound of Behemoth.

“Priscilla.”

At the same time, I called Priscilla's name.

Priscilla created ice in the air towards me.

The ice appeared like a step near my feet, and I kicked off of it.

Astina was slightly startled by my movement but quickly grasped the situation and used magic.

She flew into the air to avoid me.

I wasn't going to miss this opportunity.

Priscilla immediately created a platform under my feet, and I kicked off of it, changing direction.

I jumped towards Astina, who had risen into the sky.

"Rudy,"

Astina, seeing me flying towards her, smiled.

"I wasn't just playing around."

Astina clenched her fist.

Then, a black dot appeared behind me.

"Huh?"

My body, heading towards Astina, was drawn towards that dot.

Pressure was applied to my body.

It wasn't just me feeling it.

The dirt on the ground, trees, rocks.

Everything was drawn towards that dot.

I tried to escape, but escaping wasn't my first priority.

Since all the objects around were being pulled towards that point, I had to block the ones coming towards me.

"Behemoth! Priscilla!"

Behemoth disintegrated the stones coming towards me, and Priscilla blocked in front of me with ice.

"Ugh…"

I could block the flying stones, but not all of them.

A branch pierced through Priscilla's ice, scratching my body, and the dirt created from the disintegrated stones obscured my vision.

I couldn't just keep taking hits like this.

"Teleport."

I used spatial magic to try to get out of the area.

"Huh?"

But I couldn't fully escape.

I tried to get completely out of the black object's range, but I ended up in a strange place.

What the hell happened?

The black object pulled me in again.

Confused, I felt my body being drawn in.

Astina smiled and continued her attack.

"Ignition."

A very basic spell.

Yet, a huge flame was created.

Astina didn't need to send that spell flying.

The black object pulled the flame towards it.

My body and Astina's ignition spell both headed towards the black star.

It was clear that Astina's spell would collide with me.

Seeing this, Astina spoke.

"Is that all?"

Her tone was taunting.

Yet, I wasn't angry.

That was her way of telling me to give it my all.

Her taunt was actually her way of saying it was okay to attack her.

She was being considerate.

"Phew…"

Because this was a spar, I had been holding back a bit.

Even if I tried to fight with all my might, my subconscious held me back.

We could seriously hurt each other if we weren't careful.

Motivated by Astina's words, I decided to go for it.

"Spatial Severance."

I cast a spell on the incoming flame.

The space split, and the gap swallowed the flame.

It missed again.

I accurately targeted the flame with Spatial Severance.

Yet, it slightly missed.

Luckily, the flame disappeared, but it wasn't good.

I had to figure it out.

Why was this happening?

Just now, even trying to escape with spatial magic, the destination was odd.

And this spell didn't work exactly as intended either.

I focused.

I observed the surroundings.

Thinking about why this happened and how to deal with it.

The only thing that changed between then and now was the black object pulling me in.

How could it affect the spatial domain? An ordinary person can't influence spatial magic.

So…

"Coordinates…"

The anomaly wasn't in the spatial domain.

It occurred in the coordinates of the real domain.

I had seen Professor Mcguire's magical device before.

A device that causes coordinate confusion in the opponent, preventing them from using magic correctly.

That black object seemed to be causing such a phenomenon.

I had heard that strong gravity can warp space, but I wondered if gravity of that level could also do so.

One thing was clear, regardless.

That black object was causing confusion in the coordinates.

Couldn't it be destroyed?

Eliminating it would be the best situation.

I glanced at Astina and took a deep breath.

"Priscilla."

Reading my thoughts, Priscilla created ice near me.

This ice wasn't for blocking attacks.

Ice was created in the direction of the black object.

I kicked off this ice to create distance between the object and myself.

"Ignition. Wind Blaster."

Noticing something odd, Astina used magic towards me.

Flames created by Ignition rode the wind towards me.

The gravity created by the black object accelerated it.

I glanced at the attack and clenched my fist.

I aimed.

The attack, the black object, and even Astina were aligned in a straight line.

Mana gathered in my fist.

And I pulled back my fist.

“Haaah!”

Exhaling a shout, I thrust my fist forward.

Boom!!!

The mana in my fist exploded, sweeping objects in its path.

“Uh…”

Astina’s eyes widened.

She had grown a lot, but so had I.

My mana had increased since before, and I handled it more comfortably.

Astina had not seen an attack of this scale.

Unanticipated by Astina, she was swept away by the storm of mana.

In that situation, I saw the black object.

Crack…

The black object couldn’t withstand the storm of mana.

Simultaneously, I rushed forward.

“Ugh… Gravi…”

“Too late.”

I pulled back my fist.

And thrust it again.

Astina's eyes widened.

"Again…?"

Not only had Astina not seen an attack of this scale.

She didn't know I could use it multiple times.

Another storm of mana burst from my fist.

And swept around Astina.

---

"Will you continue?"

"…Seeing the state of things, you're asking if we should continue?"

Astina pointed to the surroundings in disarray.

I scratched my cheek and laughed awkwardly.

"Ha ha…"

After my attack, there was an explosion on Astina's side.

Still, Astina wasn't seriously injured.

It was thanks to her magic blocking my attack simultaneously.

The problem was what followed.

When Astina blocked the attack, she reversed her own gravity to push the attack away.

This time was no different.

Astina couldn't push away all the attacks, but she managed to push away most of

them.

This is where the problems began.

The mana storm I created was pushed away and fell below.

The surroundings were a mess… no, they were utterly devastated.

As a result, we had no choice but to stop fighting.

“About this place… Is it okay to just use it like this?”

“There couldn’t possibly be land near the capital that you can just use however you want…”

I looked around.

Certainly, when we arrived, the area was lush with trees, but now all the trees were destroyed.

Moreover, the ground was dug up and turned lumpy.

“But, I thought this land didn’t matter, isn’t that why we came here?”

“I didn’t know you could use such techniques; that’s why we came.”

“Ah…”

Cold sweat ran down my forehead.

“Then… Shouldn’t we do something about it? We can’t just leave it like this and run away…”

There are few in the empire who could wreak such havoc on a mountain.

There’s no one else who could create the appearance of a storm having swept through, not just burning or cutting down trees.

The moment the land’s owner decides to reveal themselves, getting caught is only a matter of time.

So, we had to either come to an agreement or something.

“We do need to come to an agreement, but…”

“Who owns this land? Since I caused this, I should at least go and apologize…”

“No… It’s largely my fault for causing this, so I’ll go.”

“No, it’s my responsibility since I used the technique…”

“No, it’s because I deflected that technique…”

After a not-quite-argument, it was decided that we would go together to meet the owner.

“But, who is the owner of this land?”

“It’s owned by the Order.”

The Order.

That meant a religious group that worshipped the main god, Karua.

I was surprised by this unexpected revelation.

“If it’s the Order’s land… Why did we suddenly come here…”

I’ve heard countless times that the Order was corrupt.

People in the magical academic circles always thought poorly of the Order, seizing any opportunity to criticize them.

And I’ve heard it numerous times from Haruna, so in my mind, the Order was marked as a corrupt organization.

“Ah, don’t worry. That person is quite decent. They’re also associated with the family.”

“Family?”

Though I had many questions, I followed Astina to the Order for now.

# CHAPTER 279
# BEATRICE (5)

“Here.”

The place Astina and I arrived at was a temple in the capital.

The temple, adorned with white marble, was beautiful, and its appearance under the sunlight was sublime.

If I hadn’t known about the clergy, I would have exclaimed in admiration.

However, now I thought about how much money had been spent to build this building.

How much money must those religious groups have to build such a temple?

From the architectural style to the location of the land, it was evident a lot of money had been splurged.

“Let’s go in.”

I followed Astina into the temple.

As we entered, a priest greeted us.

“Hello. What brings you here?”

“We’ve come to see a high priest.”

Astina had a brief conversation with the priest, and I stepped back to look up at the ceiling.

Angels descending from the sky and humans welcoming them.

And a woman standing at the forefront.

She was a sacrifice presented before the angels.

What does this mean…

Just a decoration carved out?

“Rudy.”

Astina, having finished her conversation, walked over to me.

“Did it go well?”

“Yeah, he’s inside. Let’s go in.”

I followed Astina into the room.

Inside, an old man was sitting.

His face was deeply wrinkled, and he looked so old that he moved with difficulty.

“High Priest Johann, how are you?”

“Astina, it’s been a long time. How is your father?”

The grandfather greeted Astina with a kind smile.

Despite his age, he had a gentlemanly appearance.

“Yes, he’s doing well in the fief.”

“That’s good to hear. May Karua’s blessing be upon you. But what brings you here, Miss Astina?”

“Oh, I came to talk about that land you mentioned last time.”

Astina spoke to High Priest Johann about the incident we caused.

High Priest Johann was taken aback but soon let out a resigned laugh.

“Ah… Training can lead to such outcomes… Now, the aftermath is the problem.”

“I will take care of it with my family. It’s my responsibility since I caused it.”

“No. I’m the one who said you could train on that land, so this old man will take responsibility. Ah…”

“I’m sorry.”

“No need. It must be Karua’s will. But, who is this behind you?”

High Priest Johann pointed at me standing behind Astina.

“Hello. My name is Rudy Astria.”

“Oh, Rudy Astria? Are you…?”

High Priest Johann looked at me with wide eyes.

Then, he carefully opened his mouth.

“Are you the Rudy Astria of the Astria family I know of?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“I see…”

High Priest Johann licked his lips.

I tilted my head, wondering if there was something going on.

“Do you have something to say?”

“No, it’s just fascinating to meet someone I’ve only heard about in stories. Ahaha.”

It didn’t seem like that was all…

“How do you know the clergy, Astina?”

I had never heard that Astina was a follower.

Nor had I seen her praying alone.

If anything, Astina didn't seem to like the clergy much.

Always believing in her own power and living in reality, it was unlikely for someone who is a wizard to favor an invisible god.

In response to my question, Astina smiled and answered.

"Our fief has some connections with the temple."

"Connections?"

"You know our fief is a commercial city, right?"

"Yes, I know that…"

"Because there are a lot of people coming and going, many of them follow religions. So, our fief and the temple have developed a sort of connection."

Her words meant the connection wasn't because Astina or her father were followers, but more of a political reason.

"So, you got to know High Priest Johann through such reasons?"

"Something like that. He's a good person, unlike other clergy members, so we got to know each other better."

It felt almost like insulting the clergy in front of one, which was a bit embarrassing.

I glanced at High Priest Johann.

"Ahaha, it's okay. Even within the clergy, there can be those who are lacking."

"Regardless, High Priest Johann has helped a lot in expanding our territory. He even helped to establish a small school for nurturing talents and facilities like orphanages, all at his own expense. Back then, we were just a small fief unable to offer any compensation."

"Ahaha, I only did what Beatrice commanded. Any thanks should be directed to Beatrice."

Beatrice?

My eyes widened.

The saint of the previous generation and the one who summoned me.

I had heard stories about that person, but aside from Haruna, I had never met anyone who actually knew her.

And Haruna didn't speak much about her, only in a business-like manner, as if discussing history.

Curious, I asked.

"Do you know much about her?"

"Eh? Are you talking about Beatrice?"

"Yes, I'm quite curious about her."

"If you're curious…"

"It's about who she was. I'm quite interested in her."

I knew somewhat about Beatrice's death.

Her sudden disappearance and the emergence of the next saint, Haruna, had been discussed at the academy.

I couldn't say I knew much about her life.

Since people weren't interested in the clergy, they also didn't know much about the movements of the saints.

Upon hearing my words, High Priest Johann displayed a somewhat sad smile.

"Do you understand what the position of a saint really entails, Rudy?"

A saint is supposed to represent the clergy and be a girl who has received God's will.

Technically, it means someone like Haruna, who inherited dimensional magic.

But I didn't answer directly, instead throwing the question back somewhat to gauge his thoughts.

"A saint is someone who has received the greatest blessing from God, isn't it?"

That's how the clergy described saints.

However, High Priest Johann shook his head.

"A saint is someone who has received a curse from God."

"Excuse me?"

A curse?

"You know that a saint can see the future, right?"

"Yes, I'm aware of that much…"

"Some might see the ability to foresee the future as a blessing, but seeing the future is no different from a curse."

"So, are you saying God cursed the saints?"

"What may be a gift of goodwill to some may also be a curse to others. If truly it was a blessing bestowed by God, then He should have also given the saints the power to change that future."

High Priest Johann said this and then looked up at the ceiling.

"Beatrice did her best to struggle against such a curse. She tried to use the future she saw to prevent even the smallest sacrifices. But not all events in the world can be stopped. That's why she spent many nights in tears, blaming herself for not being able to prevent what she foresaw…"

High Priest Johann said this and then laughed hollowly.

"For some, seeing the future might be a blessing. But for some… at least for Beatrice,

it was a curse."

One cannot control all futures.

We can only choose our futures.

Saving one might lead to the deaths of many, and saving many might require the sacrifice of an individual.

If there was a choice where no one dies, that would be ideal, but the world isn't so accommodating.

"The future is not something that humans can handle. Knowing the future, whether you conform to it or try to overcome it, both are incorrect."

Knowing this, Beatrice still tried to overcome it.

To conform to the future or to try to overcome it, both are wrong…

"Rather than explaining in detail about Beatrice, it's best to describe her as 'one who tried to overcome.' She tried to overcome everything. The past, the present, and the future. Ahaha, the position of a saint is truly a painful one. Truly…"

One who tried to overcome.

That remark implied a failure to overcome.

"Thank you for the wise words."

I was left pondering.

"Ah, don't mention it."

Did Beatrice truly fail?

Did she ultimately conform to the future?

Was she unable to overcome it?

"Rudy, let's head back."

“Understood.”

I didn’t dwell on it further.

Or rather, even if I did, I couldn’t have found an answer.

This answer…

I had to create it myself.

---

After Astina and Rudy left, High Priest Johann remained alone in the room.

‘High Priest Johann, please take good care of Haruna.’

He recalled what Beatrice had said.

That little girl had entrusted him with an even smaller girl.

Johann had interfered with the search for Haruna in the temple.

So that Haruna could escape.

To prevent her from being caught by the temple.

And to keep her hidden from others.

Johann himself could no longer find Haruna.

He thought it was for the best.

“What power does this old man have…”

Johann knew there was a connection between Rudy and Haruna.

Yet, he did not ask about Haruna.

He simply wanted to offer help to Haruna through that boy.

‘There are things that those who cannot see the future can do.’

Believing that his intention was understood.

He looked towards the place Rudy had disappeared.

# CHAPTER 280
# COMPLETION (1)

“Heh, have you been well?”

“Yes… Nothing much has happened.”

“Heh, that’s good to hear.”

“Prepare a cup of tea for Master Franz.”

“Ah, got it.”

Franz, the Empire’s head Wizard and owner of the Magic Tower, visited the Astria residence.

“What brings you here?”

“Heh, do we need a reason to see each other?”

I frowned at Franz’s remark.

Surely, the position of the Empire’s head Wizard is too busy for idle visits.

Why would he come without any reason?

More importantly, what is our relationship, to begin with?

No matter how I thought about it, Franz and I weren’t particularly close.

“How’s your magic training going?”

“Yes, I’ve actually found something to train on.”

After sparring with Astina, I pondered.

I was definitely superior in terms of abilities.

But that didn't mean there was nothing I could learn from Astina.

A new ability.

Astina polished a new ability.

This new ability allowed for considering various scenarios in combat.

The opponent had to think of multiple counters, giving the user the upper hand in attack choices.

This made me realize the need for a new ability.

I slowly thought it through.

Just dealing with spatial magic and fist-fighting seemed lacking.

What came to mind was the dark magic I had been neglecting lately.

Robert is gone now.

There's no teacher for dark magic, but his documents remained.

Thus, I began studying from the materials Robert had left.

Though many were difficult to understand, I researched on my own.

"Dark magic… It's a challenging path, but being Robert's disciple, I believe you'll do well."

"Thank you."

"Young master Rudy, I've brought the tea."

"Ah, thank you."

I brought the tea the maid had served to my lips.

Franz tasted the tea and quietly opened his mouth.

“The tea tastes good.”

“It’s nothing special.”

“Heh, perhaps it tastes better because of the company?”

What the hell did he eat to say that?

Is it senility because of his age?

Why has he been acting like this since the last time?

I didn’t voice those thoughts.

I just cursed him with my eyes.

Franz, noticing the look in my eyes, cleared his throat.

“Cough cough, so you’ve been researching on your own lately?”

“Yes, looks like I’ve reached the point where I need to study alone.”

“Heh, you might not need a teacher anymore, but having someone to assist in research could be beneficial.”

“I don’t think I particularly need it.”

Of course, having help would be nice.

That’s why professors at the academy have assistants, after all.

But, what I’m doing is closer to training than researching.

Creating something new wasn’t the goal; it was about interpreting and mastering existing materials.

Do I really need someone’s help for that?

“Heh, you don’t know what you’re missing.”

“Excuse me?”

“If you were just learning techniques, it might not mean much, but to properly apply those techniques in combat and use them alongside your existing skills, you’ll need support from others.”

Applying techniques in combat.

That means training is necessary.

Having someone to spar with would definitely make it easier.

Incorporating my spatial magic, Priscilla, and close combat into it…

Having someone to assist with all that would surely be beneficial.

“But it’s not like I can just receive help from anyone. And who would help…”

The people around me are busy with their own affairs.

At least, those in the capital are.

Then, an idea struck me.

“I know someone who can be of help!”

Thump!

“What?”

Franz jumped up, eyes wide.

I looked at Franz, bewildered.

“Is something wrong?”

Franz cleared his throat and sat back down.

“Ah, no. The person who can help you…”

“There’s a guy at the academy just killing time. He could be of help.”

“Cough cough. So, a student?”

“Yes, a student, but a capable one at that.”

“Ah, so just one person.”

I tilted my head.

What does he want?

“That’s for a sparring partner. You’ll also need people to collaborate with in research. And a place for training.”

“…Hmm. You’re right.”

Currently, I can research at the Astria residence in the capital, but there’s no proper place for training.

Haven’t they seen me demolish a mountain with my abilities?

Most places can’t handle the full extent of my power.

Franz smiled at this.

“How about coming to our Magic Tower?”

“…The Magic Tower?”

Hearing that, I understood Franz’s intention.

Is he trying to lure me to the Magic Tower?

“If it’s the Magic Tower, we can fully support you. We can provide a proper training facility. Plus, Luna is there too. Being together, you could compete and enhance each other’s abilities.”

Franz laughed happily.

At that, I lifted the corners of my mouth.

“So, you’re saying I could just borrow the facilities?”

“Heh… I really wish I could, but that would mean I’m giving someone special treatment.”

“Then?”

“You could join the Magic Tower temporarily. Ha! Now that I think about it, I’ve brought a contract related to that.”

It felt awkward.

Franz had clearly come prepared to lure me in.

“How about becoming a temporary member of the Magic Tower? Since you’re not affiliated with any place, there shouldn’t be a problem.”

Franz pushed the contract towards me.

I smiled and pushed the contract back towards Franz.

“Aren’t I still affiliated with the academy? And wouldn’t the academy provide a training space if asked?”

“Oh, you plan to go to the academy for training? Once the second semester starts, you’d naturally return there, but shouldn’t you enjoy the freedom while you can?”

“Being part of the Magic Tower wouldn’t exactly mean being free, would it?”

It was clear he intended to abduct me into the Magic Tower.

I had heard about such cases at the academy.

Some magic groups shove contracts at academy students and bind them in what’s essentially slave agreements.

Due to the lack of social experience, many students end up in unfavorable contracts.

Usually, it's the smaller groups that engage in such practices.

You'd think a place like the Royal Magic Tower wouldn't engage in unfair contracts, but for me, even a standard contract was essentially a trap.

Capable of using spatial magic.

Recognized by the royal family.

Son of the Astria family.

Achieved significant accomplishments at the academy.

And so on.

My credentials were unmatched by anyone.

"I can offer you a certain level of autonomy. Can't I provide that much?"

Franz pushed the contract towards me again.

"Does it say that here in the contract?"

"Ah, that's not written here! Didn't I say? This contract was 'just' 'somehow' brought along. Heh."

In other words, he was planning to take advantage of me.

"Then write it down first. Sign it too."

Franz's smile widened.

"Right, right. It should be written down."

Franz pulled the contract towards him and picked up a pen.

Before he could write anything, I spoke up.

“Write it like this. Won’t pass off strange research. Will respect personal research. Will provide special rights that no one can infringe upon.”

“…What?”

That meant I wouldn’t work for the Magic Tower’s interests.

I would do the research I wanted, come in when I felt like it, and no one could bother me about what I did.

“Don’t like it?”

This would be the kind of contract I’d be happy with.

“Cough cough cough.”

Franz hesitated with his pen for a moment.

I looked at the pen and stood up from my seat.

“If you don’t like it, there’s nothing I can do. Then I’ll be going…”

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“Didn’t I say? I’m going to the academy.”

At this moment, I am the superior party, and the Magic Tower is the inferior.

Whatever happens, I have the upper hand.

“Ah, fine. I’ll write it.”

“Ah, and also provide a personal research lab.”

“A personal research lab…?”

“Also… could you hand me the contract for a moment?”

I pulled the contract towards me from in front of Franz.

And then, I flipped the page.

“Increase my salary by about four times, and as I just mentioned, remove this attendance rule. A contract duration of 10 years? That’s downright scoundrelly. Let’s make it 3 years.”

“Ah… Ah…”

Franz was at a loss for words at my statement.

I modified the contract myself.

After making all the changes, I passed the contract back to Franz.

Franz was aghast as he looked over the revised contract.

“You want all of this?”

I nodded and smiled brightly.

“Don’t like it?”

“No, it’s not that…”

If he didn’t like it, too bad.

Franz was the one at a disadvantage.

With trembling hands, Franz tried to sign the contract.

As he was about to sign, he looked up at me.

I smiled with my eyes, watching Franz.

“Is there a problem?”

Hesitating, Franz carefully began to speak.

“Could we add just one clause to the contract?”

“I’ll listen and then decide.”

“…”

“Please, speak.”

“Could you make it so that it looks like you approached me for this contract… like you were the one who asked me…”

Franz wanted to save face.

---

“Is this the place?”

A man walked towards the Magic Tower.

He was sure the letter had directed him here, but he wondered if this was the right place.

Why would he be here?

Despite his questions, the man approached the vicinity of the Magic Tower.

“Please stop for a moment. What’s your business here?”

A guard at the Magic Tower questioned the man.

“Good day. I have this…”

The man then pulled out a letter from his pocket.

The letter was from Rudy Astria.

“Ah, a letter from young master Rudy. You may enter. Young master Rudy is waiting for you in Room 202, his personal research lab.”

“Personal research lab?”

To get a personal research lab in the Magic Tower, one had to climb to a high rank.

One would typically need to be in their 30s or 40s to even consider getting a personal lab.

It was baffling to hear that Rudy had not only joined the Magic Tower but also acquired a personal research lab without any prior notice.

The man nodded and entered the Magic Tower.

Inside, lavish decorations greeted him.

He made an awkward expression and climbed the stairs.

“Room 202…”

Upon reaching Room 202, as the guard had mentioned, there was a large sign posted.

‘Rudy Astria, Senior Researcher.’

It wasn’t just a borrowed personal lab; it was indeed his own.

Just a few weeks ago, he had heard that Rudy had renounced his heir position, yet now he was in the position of a Senior Researcher.

Being a Senior Researcher meant a position that required immense effort to attain… a position like a fantasy for wizards.

At that level, it wasn’t just a path to success; it was as if he had already achieved it.

The man opened the door with a bewildered expression.

“Oh, Evan. You’re here?”

The man was Evan.

Evan, who had been training in magic alone at the academy.

Rudy had predicted Evan would have nothing to do and called him here.

“…What on earth have you been up to?”

“Let’s explain that slowly, but you’re not busy, right?”

“Well, I guess not.”

“Then sign this.”

Rudy handed a paper to Evan.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a contract that temporarily affiliates you with the Magic Tower. If you sign, you can freely come and go as you please within the Magic Tower.”

Evan looked incredulously between the contract and Rudy.

“And what am I supposed to do after signing this?”

“Nothing much.”

Rudy stood up, stretching his shoulders.

“Time to train.”

# CHAPTER 281
# COMPLETION (2)

“What is all this?”

Evan’s eyes widened as he looked at the materials laid out in front of him.

I laughed at his reaction.

“These are the materials I’m going to study.”

Specifically, they were related to dark magic.

The materials were piled up like a mountain.

“Then why did you call me here?”

“I told you. It’s for training.”

I had no intention of getting Evan’s help in learning dark magic.

After all, Evan knew nothing about dark magic.

Trying to help would only make him a burden.

What Evan was needed for was practical training.

“I’ll learn the magic on my own, so just spar with me.”

A sparring partner.

That was Evan’s role.

With everyone around me busy with other tasks, I needed someone to spar with, and Evan immediately came to mind.

He was idle at the moment, and considering his skills, he was a fitting choice.

“So, what am I supposed to do while you’re learning magic?”

I tapped the contract Evan had signed.

“You should’ve read the contents carefully before signing.”

“What? That was to allow entry to the Magic Tower…”

“Did you think that was all? With the paper being this thick?”

Evan’s eyes widened as he looked at the contract.

He had signed it without giving it much thought.

“Even if it’s a paper handed to you by someone you know, you should still read it carefully.”

“You…!”

I burst into laughter at Evan’s surprise.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t do anything strange.”

I handed the contract back to Evan.

He slowly went through the content.

The conditions were fairly good.

“It just states that you’re a temporary researcher. You can use the Magic Tower’s resources as long as you share your research findings. You retain the ownership of the research itself, so you don’t have to worry about sharing.”

“Hmm…”

Evan skimmed through the contract before setting it down on the desk.

“…Aren’t you going to read more?”

There was still much to discuss.

Like the salary… and benefits…

I had taken great care to include many details.

As a senior researcher, I had exerted all the power I could muster to create these terms.

Instead of backstabbing such a foolish person, I had taken great care of him.

Yet.

To just toss aside my brilliant work like that?

“I’ll assume you took care of everything well.”

“Hmm…”

Maybe I should’ve added some strange clauses to the contract.

Hearing that made me somewhat want to smack him on the back of his head.

“So, I just stay here and spar with you, then?”

“Exactly.”

I sighed and nodded to Evan’s question.

The work discussion had to come first.

“How long?”

“A month.”

“A month, huh… What happens after that?”

“Oh, there’s something.”

After a month, there would be an event.

There was a fittingly sized event at the Academy.

A day when many seniors return to the Academy.

And the day the saint comes to the Academy.

“There’s Homecoming Day.”

‘The Academy is the place where saints meet their end, the ‘home’ of the saints.’

Homecoming Day wasn’t a term created with seniors in mind.

It was the day saints return to their home.

That was the essence of the Academy’s Homecoming Day.

‘The rebels will act then.’

I didn’t fully understand Aryandor’s objective.

I knew they would act then, but I didn’t know how.

Yet, I planned to go to the Academy.

It was where Haruna, Aryandor’s biggest headache, would be.

And where his sister, Beatrice, lay sleeping.

It was the place Aryandor would come to, according to the future Haruna had seen.

Honestly, I wanted the most capable in the Empire and its soldiers to protect the Academy.

But that wasn’t possible.

If we did that, Aryandor would change direction and target the Capital.

There’s no need to target the Academy first.

The fall of the Capital would be a greater loss for us.

Therefore, we must prepare.

We had to create a force capable of not losing to Aryandor.

Move the maximum amount of troops we could.

To achieve victory over Aryandor.

“Got it. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Having heard all I had to say, Evan was about to leave the room.

“Where are you going?”

“You told me to study my magic while you’re learning yours.”

“Ah, right. But.”

I stood up and lifted the corners of my mouth.

“Come to think of it, I had something to entrust to you.”

At that, Evan tilted his head in confusion.

“…A task?”

“Yes, there’s something urgent…”

Everything I had said today was the truth, but this last statement was a lie.

It was revenge for him casually tossing aside the carefully crafted contract.

---

Evan was now in the place where Ian, the commander of the Royal forces, was staying.

The task Rudy had given him was to deliver a letter to Ian.

Though it seemed like a minor annoyance and an easy task, it was anything but

simple.

It was impossible to enter through the main gate, and entrusting the letter to someone else felt too risky.

Therefore, Evan decided to infiltrate the Royal forces himself.

Reaching the place where the commander of the Royal forces stayed was no easy feat.

The security of the Royal forces was extremely tight, and Evan had to go through a lot of trouble to reach Ian.

After all the trouble to get to Ian…

“Rudy Astria sent you?”

“…Yes.”

Evan, out of breath and weary, looked at Ian in front of him.

“Why would someone who can use spatial magic send you?”

“Spatial magic?”

Ian briefly skimmed through the letter before tossing it into the trash can.

“Just tell him I got it.”

Evan looked at Ian with an incredulous expression.

“…Is that all?”

“What else…?”

Hearing that response, Evan let out a deep sigh.

“Understood… Then.”

Evan turned to leave.

That's when Ian spoke up again.

"Oh, and."

Evan turned back to see Ian smirking mischievously.

"Rudy asked me to ask you if you thought it was a nice, real world experience?"

"Real world experience…"

Big brother and the little brother…

Evan cursed inwardly.

"Then I'll really be going now…"

"Ah, don't bother sneaking out. Just walk out through the main gate. I'll tell the soldiers."

"…"

"There's no need to get the same experience twice, right?"

Thus, Evan was able to leave with the soldiers' kind guidance.

---

"Ah…"

A rundown neighborhood.

Children were gathered, and there were only a few priests around as adults.

"Hey!!! Be careful!!!"

Thud!

Suddenly, a girl running tumbled to the ground.

A young child standing there looked at her, puzzled.

"…Saint?"

The girl called a saint quickly got up.

"Are you hurt? Let me see!"

"You seem to be the one who's hurt, Saint."

The child looked at the knee of the girl called a saint.

Blood was streaming down her knee.

Yet, the girl paid no mind to her knee.

She was only concerned about the child in front of her.

"I'm fine! But you, are you hurt anywhere?"

"No…"

"Phew… That's a relief."

A girl quietly watching the scene was Haruna.

"…Is this a dream?"

Haruna looked at the girl being called a saint.

That girl was the saint, Beatrice, who had already died.

"How many years ago was this…"

It seemed like more than ten years had passed.

It was only a minor knee scrape…

But now, seeing this scene in a dream, Beatrice's knee was quite badly scraped.

Yet, Beatrice was smiling brightly.

Always thinking of others before herself, that person was Saint Beatrice.

Such a foolish person she was.

As the scene ended, it swiftly changed.

Beatrice was standing in front of Haruna with sad eyes.

“Haruna, a saint is a guide. Watching over the world to ensure it follows the right path, and occasionally guiding it.”

“Being a guide is a dangerous position. Sometimes you have to bear responsibility.”

“But, when the world is on the right path, when people have reached the correct place. The sense of achievement, the joy at that moment, is truly indescribable.”

“Haruna, I hope you too will feel this joy someday.”

With those words, the dream ended.

Haruna opened her eyes and got up from the bed.

“A guide…”

To Haruna, Beatrice was as good as a mother.

Haruna was born in a rural village and grew up in a less than favorable family environment.

Her father was always violent, and her mother paid no attention to Haruna.

It was Beatrice who saved her from such circumstances.

Beatrice always took care of young Haruna and taught her how to survive in this Empire.

Haruna learned from Beatrice how to survive as a saint and learned dimensional magic.

The day she learned dimensional magic, the first future Haruna saw was the end of

the world.

Aryandor was destroying the Empire, killing everyone, and bringing about the apocalypse.

Shocked, Haruna asked Beatrice about this future.

“You’ve found out, after all…”

At that moment, Beatrice looked sad.

Her eyes were more sorrowful than ever before.

“You don’t need to worry. I will… I will try to change it somehow. Somehow…”

However, Beatrice couldn’t resolve it.

Despite sacrificing everything, she couldn’t make a change.

“I’m sorry… I’ve passed the responsibility onto the remaining children…”

She spoke of responsibility, but in reality, she had sacrificed herself to create an opportunity.

In a future where there was no chance, she gave one.

This opportunity could not be missed.

It had to be seized by any means.

Haruna got out of bed.

“A guide.”

Today was four days before Homecoming Day.

It was the day Haruna would head to the Academy.

# CHAPTER 282
# COMPLETION (3)

Boom!

A large explosion occurred.

From the smoke, two people emerged.

“Ugh…”

“…”

The ones who came out of the smoke were Evan, swallowing a groan, and Rudy, wearing a smile as if he found it amusing.

As soon as Rudy burst out of the smoke, he activated his mana.

“Fog.”

Then, black smoke spread around Rudy.

Evan responded in kind.

“Grow.”

Suddenly, a tree, lush with leaves, grew significantly around them.

Evan hid himself inside the tree.

‘Where is it?’

Evan touched the tree, focusing all his senses.

Since the smoke obscured his vision, he listened intently for any sign.

While he was concentrating, he felt a strong movement of mana from afar.

Evan drew his sword.

“Suck!”

The storm of strong mana quickly enveloped Evan, and he brought his sword to meet it.

As the mana storm touched Evan’s sword, it disappeared with a bright light.

Not all of it vanished, but he was able to eliminate the mana coming directly at him.

Having blocked the attack to some extent, Evan thought about his next move.

He gathered mana into his sword.

A green aura collected around Evan’s sword, and he observed the situation.

Rustle.

That’s when he sensed a slight movement.

Evan immediately swung his sword in that direction.

The green mana transformed into a sword strike and flew towards it.

“Ah.”

Where the sword energy flew, a wolf with silver fur was revealed.

‘It’s not Rudy?’

As soon as he made that judgment, a black figure appeared behind Evan.

Holding a scythe, wearing a black hood, it was a demon controlled by Rudy.

Clank, chains shot out from the black figure, binding Evan’s body.

Evan struggled, trying to cut through the chains.

“Shall we continue?”

The smoke where the voice came from slowly cleared, and Rudy walked out from there.

Behind Rudy was the shape of a demon, and he had already gathered mana in his hand, ready to attack.

Evan sighed upon seeing Rudy like this.

“Let’s stop.”

“Okay.”

Rudy smiled and waved his hand a few times.

Then, the chains binding Evan were released.

Evan, touching the area the chains had been, looked at Rudy in front of him.

“Now I can’t even tell who’s the demon.”

“What demon.”

Rudy chuckled at Evan’s words.

It had been about a month since Evan and Rudy started training at the Magic Tower.

Rudy had learned the dark magic left by Robert.

Of course, Evan also underwent various forms of growth.

He delved deeper into nature magic and, with the support of the Magic Tower, explored the unique magic nullification that only he could use.

Despite these efforts, Evan couldn’t surpass Rudy.

He marveled at Rudy’s rapid advancement.

It had only been a month of research at the Magic Tower.

In just a month, Rudy experienced significant growth.

Not that Evan envied the stronger Rudy.

Rudy's strength was acquired at the cost of great pain.

His power stemmed not from innate talent or mere effort but from pushing his body to its limits to gain it.

The primary drawback of learning dark magic was this very process.

When a spell failed, it resulted in a curse, inflicting severe pain.

The more powerful the magic used, the more intense the pain.

Rudy practiced his magic fearlessly, oblivious to such repercussions.

Consequently, Rudy's body was severely damaged, and Evan witnessed his suffering.

Rudy honed his magic through curses and pain, heedless of the consequences.

From an outsider's perspective, it was a pitiable sight.

The silver lining, however, was Rudy's remarkable growth.

But that didn't mean he had become proficient in dark magic at an expert level.

He had only mastered about ten spells to a degree that they could be utilized in real combat.

While this might not sound impressive, when combined with other forms of magic, it significantly expanded his combat strategies.

"Let's take a break now," Rudy suggested, tossing a towel to Evan and sitting down on the floor.

Evan caught the towel and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Was that the last one?" Evan asked.

“Yeah. I probably won’t learn any more,”

Rudy replied, having decided on the spells he needed to learn from the moment Evan arrived.

And today, he had mastered the last of them.

“So, what do we do now?” Evan asked.

“Now it’s time to start moving,” Rudy declared.

As he said this, Luna approached from a distance.

“Rudy!” she called out.

Rudy greeted her with a broad smile.

“Luna, you’re here?”

“Yeah, have you finished training?”

“Somewhat,” Rudy replied.

Luna nodded and pointed behind her.

“Ian’s here,” she announced.

Ian was standing there.

---

“The rebels have moved.”

“Has the main force moved?”

“Not just the main force, but all the nobles on the outskirts of the Empire have mobilized.”

“The others” referred to the nobles who had been on the outskirts of the Empire.

“So, how will the Royal army move?”

“The Royal army will split into two groups, led by me and Astina. I’ll deal with the nobles on the outskirts, and Astina will handle the main force.”

“So, is Astina heading towards the Academy?”

“No, she isn’t.”

I tilted my head in confusion.

“Didn’t you say Astina would confront the main force?”

“We don’t yet know where the rebels’ main force will move. Astina will station near the Persia territory and follow the rebels as they move.”

It wasn’t a wrong approach.

We were somewhat predicting that Aryandor will head towards the Academy, but there’s no solid evidence to back this up.

Even if Haruna has seen the future, there’s no guarantee it will unfold exactly as seen, with most of the evidence being circumstantial at best.

“And it’s not like the Academy will crumble without the Royal army, so this strategy might be better.”

The Academy has many professors, and both Evan and I, among others, are planning to go there.

We have plenty of talented individuals ready to fight.

Moreover, the terrain towards the Academy from the rebel side is extremely harsh.

If they try to force their way through, they’ll take significant losses.

The Academy could not only hold out against the rebels until Astina arrives but might even manage to win against them.

Of course, things rarely go as predicted.

Surely, the rebels will have some sort of plan.

But predicting those plans now was not possible.

Hence, the idea was to draw as much of the Royal forces as possible.

Having a larger force allows us to respond to unexpected moves…

But we couldn't fuss over it here.

Ian must have thought it all through already to devise this plan.

I had no choice but to nod in agreement.

"Understood. I will keep what you said in mind."

"If the Academy is in danger, I'll use spatial magic to get there if necessary. And if there's trouble at the Academy, forces from the capital will be deployed, so there shouldn't be a big problem."

"Understood. Then we'll proceed as planned."

"Right."

Ian smiled and nodded.

Then he glanced at his watch.

"It's about time to go."

Ian got up from his seat.

I looked back at Luna and Evan behind me.

"Let's go now."

"Yes!"

Ian then moved to step out first.

He paused for a moment in his steps.

Then he turned around.

“Rudy Astria.”

“Yes?”

Ian looked at me intently before posing his question.

“Aryandor, can you win against him?”

I’ve learned a lot over this time.

I’ve done a lot to be able to defeat Aryandor.

So, can I beat Aryandor?

To that question, I couldn’t respond with a confident win.

I’ve fought Aryandor several times before.

In those battles, I never clearly won once.

While the outcomes of the fights were favorable, I never won in the fights themselves.

But.

That doesn’t mean.

I’ve ever truly lost either.

“I’m not confident in winning. But.”

So, there was one thing I could be sure of.

“I’m also not confident in losing.”

---

“Is everyone ready?”

The rebel’s stronghold.

There, numerous people stoo armed, and behind them stood giant golems.

But that wasn’t all.

In the sky flew monsters like dragons and gargoyles, and in front were undead creatures like skeletons.

“The will of God is with us, and we will win. Those of us who win will change the world!”

It might seem absurd to talk about the will of the God surrounded by undead, but no one murmured in dissent.

Everyone here was united with a single purpose.

To change the world.

To bring down a world dominated by nobility.

Though all were united in this purpose, just one person had a different intent.

“Aryandor.”

“Yes.”

Aryandor stood at the very front of the people.

“Let’s go.”

With Aryandor’s voice, the troops began to move.

# CHAPTER 283
# COMPLETION (4)

“Ah, geez…”

Yuni, as always, let out a sigh while walking through the academy garden.

“How long has it been since school ended and yet again…”

Yuni was preparing for the Homecoming Day.

She set up various facilities and placed them in the necessary positions, checked the list of events to be held, and measured the appropriate budget for them. In addition to this, she also spent time inspecting the spaces to be used.

“At least it’s smaller than other years, so I guess you should be thankful for that.”

Kuhn, who was next to Yuni, scolded her for her grumbling.

At Kuhn’s words, Yuni snorted.

“Thankful, my ass. That’s the problem.”

The reason this year’s Homecoming Day was scaled down was because of the rebels’ movements.

It was difficult for alumni to return to the academy, and with the professors busy preparing, the event size was significantly reduced. Originally, the event could have been canceled, but it was proceeding as usual.

“Why not just cancel it? It was canceled last year, after all.”

“Last year, the rebels directly invaded, that’s why.”

“They could come this year too.”

“That’s true but…”

Kuhn couldn’t argue against Yuni’s words. Looking at the rebels’ actions so far, they always had an obsession with the academy.

Their forces were stationed near the academy, so there was a sense of unease.

“Should we just say not to do it?”

“……Hmm.”

Yuni clearly didn’t want to work, but suggesting to stop didn’t seem like a bad idea.

Preparing for such an event might be less important than preparing for the rebels.

But then, what was the point of stopping now?

There were only four days left until Homecoming Day.

The preparations were practically completed. Canceling the event at this point wouldn’t do anything.

“Let’s go talk to Vice-Principal Cromwell, at least…”

“Talk?”

At that moment, a voice came from behind them.

“……Vice-Principal?”

Behind Yuni and Kuhn, Cromwell was standing tall.

Cromwell approached them with a smile.

“Is there any problem with the event? Talk?”

“No, it’s not that… But, what brings you here, Vice-Principal?”

“Can’t a Vice-Principal walk around the academy?”

“That’s not it but…”

“Heh, don’t worry. I didn’t mean anything by it. I was just checking to see if the preparations for the event were going well. Don’t worry.”

“Ah…”

Kuhn, hearing Cromwell’s words, looked around cautiously.

He wanted to bring up the event, but standing in front of Cromwell, he couldn’t decide what to say.

‘Proposing to just cancel the event outright might look problematic… ‘

While Kuhn was thinking that,

“Vice-Principal. What about canceling the event?”

Yuni blurted out abruptly.

Kuhn, flustered, waved his hands.

“No, if you say it like that…”

Cromwell brushed off Kuhn’s reaction and looked at Yuni.

“What’s the matter?”

“With the possibility of war, doesn’t it seem odd for us to be giggling among ourselves? Practically no one will come anyway. Wouldn’t it be better to use these resources elsewhere?”

“……Yuni?”

Kuhn was taken aback by Yuni’s logically structured argument.

Was it really just her aversion to work that led to this suggestion, or did she genuinely hold these beliefs?

That was unclear.

Nevertheless, what Yuni said was also what Kuhn had wanted to say.

It was a question he had subtly raised to Cromwell when the event was first announced, but Cromwell hadn't given a definitive answer.

He simply instructed to hold the event as planned.

Kuhn watched closely to see how Cromwell would respond.

"Hmm… For now, both of you follow me."

"Yes?"

"There's something I need to say about that. You'll understand if you follow."

With a puzzled look, Yuni and Kuhn hesitated but decided to follow Cromwell, hoping for an explanation.

---

"……Senior?"

Yuni and Kuhn's eyes widened.

The place Cromwell led them to was the vice-principal's office.

Inside, Rudy was sitting.

Rudy smiled and waved his hand.

"Have you arrived?"

"Rudy… and that person is…"

But that wasn't all.

The woman sitting next to Rudy, wearing a priestess's attire and a black eye patch, was Saint Haruna.

"Hello. Are you the current student council members?"

Haruna smiled and greeted them.

“How did this happen…”

The Saint was expected to come for Homecoming Day, but Rudy was not.

The Empire was in a tumultuous state right now.

They naturally thought Rudy would be heading to the front lines.

He was a highly regarded talent in the Empire.

With such a person at the academy, many questions arose.

“You said it, didn’t you? Shouldn’t we prepare for the war? We’re not just fooling around. Everything we did was necessary.”

“But, but. Just calling Saint Haruna and Rudy seems…”

Rudy may be strong, but preparing for war requires more than just strength.

A war needs numerous soldiers and commanders, not just a few powerful individuals.

This left Kuhn feeling that just the two of them were insufficient.

Cromwell shook his head at Kuhn’s doubt.

“It’s not just the two of us coming. What’s the name of the event we’re hosting?”

“Homecoming Day… So…”

“A lot of people will come home to the academy. What we sent to the alumni wasn’t an invitation to an event but a letter asking for help.”

“What? Why go through all that… You could have just called in the troops from the start.”

“Moving troops always requires caution. It’s much better if the other side doesn’t know. Besides, preparing for the event allowed us to make several preparations.

With the students gathered here, there's no need to evacuate separately, and the items we've placed can be used for protection."

Cromwell wasn't interested in the event itself.

He was just looking towards the future.

And exploiting it.

To create a more advantageous situation by making the opposition complacent.

He was preparing for that.

Then Yuni tilted her head.

"So why is the Saint here?"

"Hmm? Since it's Homecoming Day, naturally…"

"No, if we're really preparing for war, shouldn't the Saint be evacuated to a safe place? It's dangerous if she's here when they attack."

Yuni's doubt wasn't unwarranted.

Cromwell had acted under the assumption that the opposition would attack.

Then, shouldn't the Saint, who lacks combat ability, be sent to a safe place?

Haruna shook her head in response.

"I came here to do my job."

"Your job?"

"There's a place I need to protect."

---

"Deputy Commander."

As Astina walked along the sacred wall, she turned her head.

Behind her was a soldier.

“What’s the matter?”

“It seems they’re beginning to move.”

“Which direction?”

“Towards the academy.”

As expected, the rebels were moving towards the academy.

“Pass the message to Commander Ian, and we’ll move out.”

“Understood.”

After speaking to the soldier, Astina headed towards the barracks.

The soldiers outside the barracks were all looking in Astina’s direction.

‘The beginning, then.’

Astina scanned the soldiers looking at her.

“Listen up, everyone. The rebels have moved. They’re heading towards the Liberion Academy, and we’re going to protect it.”

“Understood!!!”

The soldiers responded with a resounding voice.

These were soldiers who had been with her for about half a year, dear to her heart.

Astina bit her lip briefly before speaking again.

“……What we’re engaging in is war. The person next to you might die, and you might die too. But, it’s not a meaningless death. Because you fight, the citizens of the Empire, our families, will survive. So, on their behalf, I say thank you.”

Some soldiers were visibly moved by Astina's words, but most burst into laughter.

"Deputy Commander! Saying it like that makes it sound like we're already dead!"

"Deputy Commander is so meticulous yet clumsy. Why say something like that now?"

The soldiers chuckled and teased Astina.

Astina smiled at them.

In a situation where they could be tense and afraid, they were laughing.

"Alright, sorry. Then tell this inexperienced Deputy Commander what needs to be done."

"Aren't there simple words you can use? Easy words."

"Easy words?"

"Really, you're so dense."

The soldiers suggested a few words to Astina.

With a burst of laughter, Astina cleared her throat again.

"Fine. Here goes."

Astina raised her fist to the sky and shouted.

"Let's kill all those bastards! We're going home!!!!"

It was a straightforward statement.

It wasn't the kind of phrase you'd expect from the usually stern Astina.

The soldiers laughed, seeing Astina utter such refreshing words.

"Deputy Commander."

Then, a soldier approached Astina and handed her a helmet.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Astina mounted her horse, leading the barracks’ soldiers towards the academy.

# CHAPTER 284
# COMPLETION (5)

Kuhn, Yuni, and I followed Haruna.

And the place we arrived at was.

"…Why have we come here all of a sudden?"

A place very familiar to us.

It was the student council room.

Haruna looked at us with a smile.

"I will be here during the war."

"What?"

"Hmm?"

I, too, tilted my head at her words.

Although I had heard that Haruna had something to protect, I was puzzled to hear that it was located in the student council room.

"What's here?"

"You won't be able to see it with your eyes."

"Hmm?"

Haruna stretched her hand towards the ceiling.

Then, the surroundings started to ripple.

“What, what’s this?”

“This is……”

Kuhn and Yuni widened their eyes at the sight.

This must have been their first time witnessing such a scene.

But I knew.

“…Spatial magic?”

It certainly resembled spatial magic, but it looked fundamentally different.

Something was happening in the spatial domain, but it felt different from what we were used to.

It was as if the world was turning upside down.

The rippling space gradually changed, and a place other than the student council room began to appear.

I narrowed my eyes and looked at Haruna.

“Where is this?”

“This is the Holy Land of Terasant. The place where the Saints face their end, as I mentioned.”

Surrounded by numerous jars.

So, these are……

Haruna walked towards the jars.

“These are all the remains of Saints. They have been cremated and stored here.”

“This place…”

“It’s a location created with dimensional magic. The student council room serves as

its door."

"The student council room?"

Why the student council room of all places?

The student council room couldn't exactly be called a safe space.

If it were truly a safe place, the vice principal's or principal's office would have been a better location.

"I also don't know why the door is here. It was simply the will of our ancestors."

"Ancestors?"

"Do you know how this academy was founded, Rudy?"

I wasn't very familiar with that.

I only knew that it was an academy built in the early days of the empire.

"In the past, magic, religion, and politics were united in strength. They were equal groups. That's why the order was so powerful, and why this academy emphasizes equality. It's also why spatial magic is called a divine power."

Despite differences in status, they supported each other, speaking informally and growing their abilities.

Was that the reason?

Because everyone was equal in the past?

I had no idea there was such a reason behind the aspects I hadn't paid much attention to.

"However, as time passed, these three paths diverged, some aspects merged, and some devolved. But as I just mentioned, traces of these three being together are still found in many places."

Haruna stretched her hand forward.

“The traces left in this academy are right here. The place where the Saints’ bodies are stored, the Holy Land of Terasant.”

Thinking about it made me start to see other aspects.

“So, is that why a Saint comes every Homecoming Day?”

“Yes. Of course, they come for reasons other than predicting the future.”

“Do they come to check if this sanctuary is well?”

“Yes. It’s good to have a quick understanding.”

I recalled thoughts from past Homecoming Days.

Why a Saint comes every year to predict the future.

It was a bit strange from the start.

Why would a Saint come if they couldn’t provide a proper prediction of the future?

I wondered if there was some kind of deal between the Church and the academy, but I had no idea about this past.

“Anyway, Aryandor will probably target this place. Because it also contains the remains of Lady Beatrice.”

That raised a question in me.

“But, why leave the remains here? If Aryandor comes here, wouldn’t it be to obtain those remains?”

Haruna shook her head.

“Rudy, have you not seen the power of these remains?”

“…Me?”

When did I ever.

I had no clue about such a thing.

“Remember the incident when we brought back your body from the future?”

“…Ah.”

“This place provides the best environment for a Saint to exert their abilities. It allows them to do things they normally couldn’t.”

“Why would the remains have such power…?”

“The Saints do not lose their power even in death.”

“Even in death?”

“A Saint’s body is connected to Saints in other dimensions. The basis of this connection is these remains. Based on this ability, they can see the future and the past. These remains need to be preserved so that Saints from other dimensions can see our dimension, and I can exert my proper abilities.”

The basis of dimensional magic.

That was what these remains were.

Crossing dimensions to scan the future and the past, and connecting different dimensions was this place’s role.

“We can’t just eliminate this place. We have to protect it at all costs.”

“…”

Then Yuni put a hand on my shoulder.

“Just protect it, right? Then there shouldn’t be any problem.”

Her words made me chuckle as if it was nothing significant.

Yuni was right.

We just need to prevent Aryandor from coming here.

“Yeah, we just need to protect this place. But, can Aryandor enter here?”

“Yes, this place can be entered using spatial, temporal, and dimensional magic as keys.”

I nodded and smiled.

“Got it. Then I’ll make sure he can’t even get close. That should do it, right?”

At that, Haruna smiled.

“Yes, that will do.”

---

I left the place Haruna had explained and headed towards where Cromwell was.

During the move, I suddenly noticed something odd.

People outside were moving in an organized manner.

I watched those people before entering the vice principal’s office where Cromwell was.

“Have you returned?”

“Yes, I’ve roughly grasped the situation.”

“Good, then we should also prepare.”

“Prepare, you mean…”

“They’ve made their move.”

Was this about Aryandor moving?

And the people moving outside…

“Are we ready for war?”

“Yes, we will block them at the canyon like last time.”

The canyon that the enemy must pass through if they come from the rebel side.

Geographically, it’s an advantageous place for us.

But there was a problem.

“What about the soldiers?”

“We’ve prepared to a certain extent. But it’s still vastly insufficient.”

Last time, the Royal army was already stationed at this place.

The problem now was the lack of soldiers.

“We need to buy time until Astina arrives.”

“In an unfavorable situation?”

“Still, there’s no need to worry too much. We have many capable people, and we have a corresponding plan.”

“A plan, you mean…”

“It’s crucial not to let the enemy into the canyon. If the rebels enter the canyon now, it will be breached quickly. They will push through with their bodies using the undead.”

The canyon could maximize damage to the enemy, but it wasn’t a place that could be completely blocked.

There was no wall built there, and we couldn’t physically block it ourselves.

If we lured them into the canyon, we could inflict significant damage, but we couldn’t fully leverage the terrain’s power.

“So, you plan to stop them in front of the canyon?”

“Yes.”

“But…”

Is stopping them in front of the canyon a good plan?

That was also doubtful.

Fighting a frontal battle with our limited number of soldiers was suicidal.

“Don’t worry. I have prepared a separate method.”

“…A method?”

“Anyway, we’re moving to the canyon. I’ll explain the strategy in detail later.”

“Yes, understood.”

A method…

---

“I really hate this. I truly hate it. Really, really, truly.”

“Haha, if people could avoid doing things they hate, then no one would do anything.”

“But why do I have to do this… There are many more capable people than me…”

A vast plain.

A daunting canyon lied behind.

And far off, a cloud of dust rises.

Despite the great distance, I could see the entities there.

An undead legion, leading with giant golems and bone dragons.

It was the rebels.

The fact that they were the enemy was truly daunting.

“This task should be for Professor Cromwell or Professor Mcguire… Not just them, there are other professors too. I’m just a first-year professor… What was Professor Cromwell thinking, assigning this to a rookie professor who’s only been here for a year…”

“Haha, he must trust you a great deal to assign you this task.”

Two people stood at a distance from that dust cloud.

The strategy planned by the academy was simple.

The strong ones block with overwhelming force.

From the academy’s personnel, two were selected.

The user of electric magic, first-year Professor Gracie Lifegold.

The user of flash magic, Principal McDowell Cliver.

A combination of the academy’s most senior and the youngest professor.

“War, huh… I’ve never done anything like this…”

“Everyone has a first time.”

“Have you ever done it, Principal?”

“Haha, a few times, yes.”

“What, what was it like the first time you did it…”

“It was similar to how you feel now. And when it ended, it was truly terrible. The ground was rivers of blood, and bodies piled up like mountains. I can’t even remember how many times I threw up.”

“Heeek…”

“But.”

McDowell smiled kindly.

“Thanks to that, the people behind me were able to be safe. A lot of blood was shed in that war, but I was able to protect my people.”

“…”

“Someone has to do it, right? What would happen if you got scared here and now?”

Gracie turned to look back at the canyon.

Past this canyon is the academy.

If those monsters ahead enter the canyon, then the students, the professors, and the civilians living there will all die.

“You’re a professor, aren’t you? You have to protect the students, the academy.”

“…Right.”

Gracie clenched her fist.

And then looked ahead.

The approaching army was visible.

She was scared.

Her legs were trembling, and cold sweat was running down.

The thought that she might die here today crossed her mind.

But she couldn’t back down.

Because backing down would truly be the end.

“Can you do it now?”

“I have to… I’m a professor, after all.”

Gracie’s mana surged.

Her hair turned white, and blue lightning swirled around her.

McDowell nodded at the sight.

“Then I’ll go first.”

“Yes, I’ll follow you.”

McDowell extended his hand forward.

“Flash, beam of light.”

A giant light leaked from his hand, and thus the war began.

# CHAPTER 285
# COMPLETION (6)

The vanguard of the rebels advanced, leading with the undead.

Leading them was Venderwood.

Since both the undead and Venderwood could recover even after taking damage, they were organized as the vanguard.

As Venderwood advanced, he gradually began to see the canyon coming into view.

Venderwood glanced at it indifferently.

“We must break through here.”

Both the rebels and the Academy thought the same.

At this time, whether or not the canyon could be penetrated would significantly influence the outcome.

Both camps were aware of this and had formulated their strategies.

“Advance!!”

Venderwood commanded the undead loudly.

It was then.

“Hm?”

A strong light leaked from afar.

And then.

Before Venderwood could even react to the light, it pierced through the rebel side.

Kwaaaaang!!!

The light struck precisely the middle of the undead legion, turning the undead there into dust.

Venderwood muttered to himself as he saw the vanished undead.

“A flash magic spell……”

Since he had already predicted some degree of response from the Academy, there was no reason to panic.

Venderwood looked at the situation with cold indifference.

After all, what was lost were the undead.

They knew no fear.

Even if those beside him melted away, they could still advance, and from the rebels’ perspective, the loss of undead was preferable.

The main force of the rebels was not the undead but the human soldiers behind them.

Those united by hatred for the Empire.

They were a strong unit with a clear motivation, having experienced many victories on the outskirts of the Empire.

Although they were not well-trained soldiers, their extensive combat experience meant they were no less capable than the Empire’s soldiers.

So, the loss of these undead was not a fear.

They would advance despite the losses.

Venderwood drew his sword and shouted once more.

“Advance!!”

And the one who shouted himself also charged forward.

Since no soldiers were visible in front of the canyon, there would only be one or two Wizards.

If he could rush out and block them, the undead could enter the canyon.

Fzzzt—

A strong spark was seen in the distance.

A woman with silver hair.

It was Gracie.

“Lightning Strike.”

Gracie used magic against the approaching Venderwood.

Lightning flew towards Venderwood, but he did not dodge.

He simply raised his arm to block it.

Kwajijik!

Gracie’s lightning struck Venderwood squarely.

However, it did not stop Venderwood’s movement.

Venderwood’s ability was self-healing.

Gracie’s lightning blasted his arm off, but his ability regrew it.

“What is that……”

Gracie looked incredulously at Venderwood, who was recklessly charging at her even as his arm was blown off.

It was an unbelievable situation, but Gracie couldn’t just stand by idly.

Gracie reached out to the sky.

“Thundercloud.”

As Gracie chanted the incantation, the clouds began to slowly move.

The clear sky now bore clouds moving as if a giant dragon was stirring, forming a majestic cluster.

With the clouds gathered, Gracie waved her hand.

“Strike down.”

Along with her words, Gracie lowered her hand.

Sparks flew from the gathered clouds, and lightning struck towards Venderwood.

Boom!

It wasn’t just once.

Dozens of lightning bolts targeted Venderwood.

“Ugh…”

Venderwood moved quickly upon seeing the lightning.

Even though he could recover from the lightning, there was a limit to his healing.

There was no good reason to willingly take the hits.

But he couldn’t dodge every attack.

The speed of the falling lightning was too fast for him to see and react.

So, he took the minimum number of hits while advancing forward.

Gracie was astonished at the sight.

“How can such a creature exist…”

Venderwood was struck by lightning several times.

His arm was blown off, and his body melted away to reveal his ribs.

Yet, he did not die.

He showed no fear.

It felt like facing an undead.

“Gracie. Step aside.”

At that moment, McDowell Cliver, who was behind Gracie, stepped forward and moved his mana.

A strong light emanated from McDowell’s hand.

The light targeted Venderwood precisely.

“Ugh!”

Venderwood stopped in his tracks upon seeing it.

That attack looked dangerous.

Venderwood filled his feet with mana to change direction.

And he lifted the sword he was carrying on his back.

A greatsword as large as a human.

Venderwood filled this massive sword with mana and swung it towards the direction of the incoming light.

Kwaaaaaaang!

After seeing the explosion, McDowell turned his head.

“Gracie.”

"…Ah, yes, Principal."

"I'll block the movement of the undead army. Can you handle that fellow?"

It was time to block the movement of the undead legion.

The old McDowell might have considered facing both the legion and Venderwood at once.

But the current McDowell couldn't do that.

McDowell was missing his right arm.

Due to an incident where it was cut off by Aryandor, he still couldn't exert his original abilities.

"You don't have to defeat him. Just blocking his movement will suffice."

At McDowell's words, Gracie nodded as if she had made up her mind.

"…I'll try."

"If anything happens, I'll come to assist immediately." "Understood."

After hearing Gracie's response, McDowell walked towards the undead legion, and Gracie looked towards Venderwood.

The place where Venderwood was had black smoke rising from the explosion, and he walked out from within that smoke.

McDowell's magic was potent; the wounds on Venderwood's body hadn't fully healed.

"The stronger the power, the slower the healing…"

Gracie noted that information as she glared at him.

Venderwood briefly met Gracie's gaze before looking around.

"You're alone."

"…I can stop you by myself."

"Do you really think so?"

Venderwood lifted his greatsword.

"If you don't want to die, move aside."

Instead of a word of refusal, Gracie prepared her mana for an attack.

Venderwood gave a murderous smile and spoke.

"Then you'll have to die."

Venderwood charged at Gracie with his greatsword, and Gracie surrounded her hand with electricity and stretched it towards Venderwood.

'Pierce through.'

'Block it.'

With those conflicting thoughts, their attacks collided.

---

"It has begun."

Daemon, leading the rebel's main force, judged the situation from the explosion he saw in the distance.

'This battle needs to be quick to be advantageous.'

He knew that the Royal forces were dealing with rebellions elsewhere.

The movement of the main force was preempted by activities in other areas, forcing Ian's hand.

But not all forces were diverted there.

More than half were with Astina, stationed nearby.

Even so, the current situation favored the rebels.

The undead moved faster than regular humans, preventing the enemy from reacting freely.

The rebels planned to use this advantage to gain the upper hand.

However, the moment the situation drags on, it becomes disadvantageous for the rebels.

Once Ian manages to quell the outer rebellions, he'll surely move here.

And if the Royal forces and Astina arrive, it'll undoubtedly become a tough fight for the rebels.

Daemon looked at Aryandor in front of him.

He wondered what Aryandor's plan was for orchestrating such a strategy.

'It's not like he has a special trick up his sleeve.'

As the war drags on without engaging, the rebels are increasingly at a disadvantage.

The Empire was uniting against the common enemy of the rebels, while the rebels faced issues with supplies and cohesion.

Thus, launching a total war at this opportunity was better.

At least then, there would be a chance for victory.

At that moment, Aryandor looked back.

"Daemon."

"Yes, Aryandor."

"Speed up the movement of our forces."

"Speed it up?"

It wasn't impossible.

But it wasn't a good method either.

Behind Daemon were human forces, different from the undead.

They had physical limits and emotions.

Without proper food provision, increasing the marching speed would surely lower the morale of the troops.

Moreover, an army exhausted from forced marches could not be expected to fight properly.

It would have been a better decision for Aryandor or Daemon to move and support Venderwood's undead legion rather than speeding up the army's movement.

"Move at an unpredictable speed to catch them off guard."

Daemon did not respond to Aryandor's suggestion.

"Daemon?"

Prompted by Aryandor, Daemon finally spoke.

"…That seems difficult."

Daemon had never objected to Aryandor's commands before.

It was because of his trust in Aryandor.

However, Aryandor now seemed to have lost that trust.

"Are you refusing my order?"

"If you provide a valid reason, I will follow. But I cannot do so without any reason."

Aryandor, after a moment of silence, spoke.

"Do you think our forces can defeat the Royal and Academy forces?"

"…What are you saying?"

"Do you think the current rebels, including us, can win this war against those on the other side? Against Ian Astria, Rudy Astria, Cromwell, and others who have made a name for themselves in the Empire?"

Daemon looked at Aryandor incredulously.

"Isn't it our job to make them win? To increase our chances of victory even by a little, to strategize and make our soldiers win, isn't that what a commander is for?"

"Our role is to win this war, yes. But winning this war doesn't necessarily mean we have to use the soldiers."

Daemon furrowed his brows.

"What are you saying?"

"Even if we lose the frontal battle, we can still win the war."

"What are you planning?"

"What do you think our goal is?"

"To change the Empire. Do you share the same thought, Aryandor?"

Aryandor nodded.

"Yes, to change the Empire. I think the same. To completely, utterly change the Empire itself."

A shiver ran down Daemon's spine.

It was because of the madness lurking in Aryandor's eyes as he spoke.

"What are you intending to do?"

"Do I need to spell it out? Haven't we always agreed that if there's a goal, the means don't matter?"

"…"

There was no rebuttal.

Everyone had agreed to this.

That it was acceptable to use someone's life for a goal.

Even those not present had agreed to this fact.

"…Understood. I will follow your will."

Daemon silently turned and shouted orders to the troops behind him.

"Increase the speed of our movement!"

"Yes, that's a good decision."

Aryandor smiled and patted Daemon on the shoulder.

# CHAPTER 286
# COMPLETION (7)

“Is it Professor Gracie and Principal McDowell?”

“Yes, those two are holding them back.”

Both Professor Gracie and Principal McDowell are among the academy’s strongest.

They were among the few talents in the academy who were more confident in combat than in research.

However, it wasn’t easy for them to hold back the undead legion.

The undead legion’s ability to push forward was one thing, but they also don’t feel fear.

For humans, showing a few strong abilities might make soldiers hesitate, but such tactics don’t work on the undead.

They lack intelligence.

They only follow the commander’s orders, driven by hatred for the living.

They would keep moving forward towards the canyon, regardless of their comrades falling beside them.

I looked at Cromwell, who was beside me.

“Can they hold them off? Should we send reinforcements now?”

“Don’t worry. Do you think we have no plan?”

“So, is there anything to do until the main forces arrive?”

“No, there’s nothing. Everything is already prepared.”

Cromwell said that and led me away.

Cromwell led me to the top of the canyon.

“Oh, Cromwell, you’re here?”

“Professor Mcguire?”

Mcguire greeted us at that spot.

“Is everything ready?”

“We’ve been preparing for days. Of course, it is.”

Mcguire raised his thumb and smiled.

I tilted my head in confusion.

“Preparation for…?”

“Ah, that.”

Mcguire pointed behind him.

“…Why is this here?”

“If we can use it, we should. Just borrowed it for a moment.”

Behind Mcguire was a huge amplifier.

The amplifier made by Perrian Astria was set up at the top of the canyon.

---

Sparks flew around it powerfully.

Just being near it could result in death by electrocution.

Yet, Venderwood charged at Gracie.

“Lightning…!”

A giant bolt of lightning emerged from Gracie’s body and aimed at Venderwood’s sword-bearing right arm.

Zap—

Venderwood’s arm melted from the lightning, leaving only the skeletal remains.

Without flesh, the great sword was dropped.

Unfazed by the loss of his arm, Venderwood flowed like water.

He spun his body, grabbed the great sword with his left hand, spun again, and swung the sword at Gracie.

“Ugh…!”

A small cut appeared on Gracie’s face.

‘He doesn’t stop attacking even when hit… ‘

Venderwood continued his attack without hesitation, even after receiving an attack that melted his arm.

Gracie was clearly aware of this but was still taken aback.

Surely, after being hit by such lightning, one’s body should at least stop.

The electricity spreading through the body would tamper with the muscles, causing them to lose strength.

Yet, Venderwood moved.

‘What kind of freakish body structure is this…!’

“Discharge…!”

Gracie released the electricity in her body.

The burst of electricity exploded around her, and Venderwood narrowed his eyebrows and stepped back to avoid the attack.

'First off, he's not a wizard.'

That much was certain.

He was wrapped in sword energy, and with unbelievable physical abilities, he was a swordsman.

This raised an inevitable question.

What was Venderwood's ability?

Venderwood couldn't feel pain.

His body kept healing, and there was no restriction in his movement.

It felt like fighting an undead.

The natural physical reactions that should happen simply didn't.

It felt as though a different power was controlling his body.

'Did he implant a magical device in his body? But if so, it should have broken when Principal McDowell attacked earlier… '

Gracie recalled information about Raven she had learned some time ago.

That person controlled his body with a magical device implanted in his head.

He wouldn't die even if his body was destroyed, and from what she had heard, the device could also control pain.

Could Venderwood be related to that?

Gracie glared at Venderwood standing in front of her.

He was getting back into position.

‘So, what should I do… ‘

A body that doesn’t exhibit natural physical reactions.

Natural physical reactions…

To counter that…

“Ha!”

Venderwood kicked off the ground and charged at Gracie.

He swung his giant sword, as large as a person, at a fast speed.

“Ugh…”

Gracie tried to block the attack with the electricity wrapped around her hand, but the swift sword strikes began to leave small cuts on her body.

She started to feel little pains.

Thigh, arm, cheek.

They weren’t fatal wounds, but the damage was accumulating.

The small injuries stung as if warning her to be careful.

It was okay for now, but if she accumulated more injuries, it might become difficult to move.

‘Just a moment… ‘

That’s when it clicked in Gracie’s mind.

Pain is a warning the body sends to a person.

It’s a signal to recognize injury and move more carefully, more safely.

Then.

Gracie extended her hand towards Venderwood.

“Electric Shock!”

Zap—

Strong electricity burst from Gracie’s hand.

Venderwood blocked the attack with his sword, and the impact pushed him back.

Gracie immediately placed her hand on the ground.

“Electric Field.”

Zzzt—

Electricity spread from Gracie to the ground.

The sand on the ground stirred due to the electricity.

“Hmm?”

Venderwood narrowed his eyebrows, observing Gracie spreading the field.

Even though the field was activated, it wasn’t particularly threatening.

Only the sand on the ground stirred slightly; there wasn’t a strong current running through the ground.

For an ordinary person, this amount of electricity could slow their movements, but Venderwood’s body could ignore such electricity.

Venderwood, while assessing Gracie’s magic, glanced at the undead legion.

The legion was being held back by McDowell, but not completely stopped.

-Grrrr…

“Damn it…”

A bone dragon with a massive body was pressuring McDowell.

McDowell had tried several flashes of magic against it but couldn't subdue it.

With the dragon holding McDowell back, the other undead could advance easily.

'Now's the time.'

Venderwood readied his sword.

McDowell couldn't stop the legion because of the bone dragon.

The legion had now reached the front of the canyon.

If he kept Gracie occupied now, the undead legion could enter the canyon.

"Huff…"

Venderwood exhaled deeply and looked at Gracie.

Gracie surrounded herself with electricity.

Her hair began to shoot upwards due to the sparks.

Zap—

Unlike the sparking sounds around, Gracie became calmer.

White light shone from her eyes, and the electricity in her hand began to form into the shape of a spear.

She extended her hand forward.

Gracie took a stance with the spear made of electricity.

Venderwood instinctively felt the danger of that spear.

If hit directly by that spear, he might not recover as easily as before.

But it didn't matter.

He just had to avoid it.

He was confident he could.

Venderwood's reaction speed was far superior to Gracie's.

The reaction speed of a swordsman compared to a wizard was incomparable.

"Huff…"

Gracie charged at Venderwood with the spear raised.

'Slow.'

Gracie's physical abilities were nothing special.

Venderwood easily stepped back, dodging Gracie's spear.

However, the role of the spear wasn't just to cut.

A strong current formed along the path of the spear Gracie had swung, and the electricity struck Venderwood's body.

The electricity entered Venderwood's body.

But that couldn't stop Venderwood's movement.

Ignoring the electricity, Venderwood charged at Gracie.

Venderwood's sword created a huge arc, aiming for Gracie.

Gracie stepped back and swung the spear again.

The electricity attacked Venderwood once more.

Venderwood, hit by the attack, advanced again.

As Venderwood advanced, Gracie was gradually pushed back.

'This should be enough… '

Venderwood glanced towards the canyon.

The undead army attempted to charge into the canyon, and McDowell tried to stop them. Gracie also noticed this.

“Ugh…”

Gracie let out a slight groan upon seeing the situation.

Venderwood didn’t miss this.

With his great sword, Venderwood charged at her swiftly.

Here, Gracie had to choose.

Whether to attack the undead legion or to block Venderwood’s attack.

Venderwood silently laughed at the thought of victory, no matter which decision she made.

Then, Gracie quietly uttered, “Got you…”

Crackle—

Electricity sparked from Venderwood’s body as he charged.

At the same time, the electricity from the ground connected with the electricity coming from his body.

“What…?”

Venderwood’s eyes widened.

Suddenly, electricity flowed, and he couldn’t move his body.

Gracie laughed.

“People feel pain for a reason.”

The electricity that Gracie had scattered with the spear earlier had been

accumulating in his body.

Instead of just shocking him and ending it, she stored the electricity in his body.

Normally, a person should feel something off about this.

But he didn't feel it.

He didn't realize the electricity was accumulating in his body, nor did it spread and dig into his muscles.

'Of course, a normal person would have died from the accumulation of electricity in their body… '

With that thought, Gracie released all the electricity inside Venderwood's body at once.

The electricity seeped into Venderwood's muscles, thinly slicing through his muscle fibers.

Thus, Venderwood couldn't move.

Even though his healing ability was remarkable, he couldn't immediately recover from his entire body's muscle fibers being cut at once.

Gracie pulled back her spear.

"My spear isn't meant for swinging."

Aimed at Venderwood.

"It's for throwing."

She threw it with all her might.

"Pierce through. Astrape."

The spear Gracie released

Swept through the surroundings at an incredible speed and

“Ah.”

Pierced through Venderwood’s heart.

Bang!

A tremendous explosion of electricity occurred.

‘Ha…!’

Venderwood thought as he watched his body burn.

That he had won anyway.

That the undead legion entering the canyon far away would bring victory to them.

However.

‘All according to plan!’

Gracie laughed, watching the undead legion enter the canyon.

# CHAPTER 287
# COMPLETION (8)

“Is it done…?”

McDowell, facing the dragon, watched the undead legion enter the canyon.

The legion moved in groups.

Under normal circumstances, this situation would have signaled the Academy’s defeat.

If it had been according to the original plan, that is.

The Academy’s initial strategy involved only Gracie and McDowell fending off the undead legion.

However, there was a problem with this plan.

The bone dragon and Venderwood needed to be stopped.

Gracie managed to stop Venderwood, while McDowell stopped the bone dragon.

Then, the moment arrived.

McDowell raised his hand high into the sky.

A small light emanated from McDowell’s hand.

The light soared high into the sky.

Bang!

It burst with bright light.

Simultaneously, a strong mana spread around.

A quivering energy enveloped the body.

The undead legion, rushing into the canyon, gradually came to a stop.

"…Huh?"

The undead soldiers stopped and looked at their comrades beside them.

And then.

Crack.

"Krararak!!!"

They attacked their own comrades.

The undead began showing hatred towards each other and started fighting.

Entangled and intertwined in the narrow canyon, they trampled and killed each other.

Screams, as if being torn apart, and the sound of bones breaking echoed across the battlefield.

McDowell looked at this scene and smiled.

The Academy's plan was to lure only the undead into the canyon.

Undead are beings that harbor hatred for life.

They possess no intelligence, only hatred.

Cromwell exploited this.

He cast a group hallucination spell on the undead, making them perceive their comrades as living beings.

Using an amplifier brought from the Empire, he spread the hallucination spell across the entire battlefield.

Caught in the narrow canyon and tangled up, unable to escape, the undead killed each other.

This was Cromwell's plan.

However, this plan had a flaw.

It would be useless if there were beings capable of controlling the undead, and meaningless if there were beings that could break through the canyon alone.

Thus, from the beginning, McDowell and Gracie targeted those who could thwart their plan.

They stopped Venderwood, who could control the undead, and the bone dragon, who could exert the force of an army alone.

While stopping them, they acted as if they were preventing anyone from entering the canyon.

"Krararak!!!"

"Haha…"

Gracie sat on the ground, watching the undead fight each other.

"I guess we get to breathe a bit…?"

Until the enemy's main force arrived, until the Royal army came to their aid, they had bought some time.

Gracie thought so.

Then.

"Do you think… it will go as you wish…"

Suddenly, a raspy voice came from behind her.

A figure with a pierced heart and melted flesh.

Venderwood was rising from the ground.

“He’s alive?”

Venderwood had taken a direct hit from Gracie’s fatal technique, ‘Astrape.’

‘Astrape’ was not just an ordinary skill.

As evidence, there was Venderwood, burnt and mangled beyond recognition, melted down.

Despite taking a direct hit from such a technique, Venderwood rose.

‘I don’t have the strength to face him anymore… ‘

Small spells could be used, but they were insufficient against Venderwood.

“Damn…”

However, Venderwood’s condition was not normal either.

His body wasn’t healing.

Only bones were barely coming together, and a few pieces of flesh were attached enough to sustain life. He couldn’t continue to fight.

But, in this situation, just maintaining life was an advantage for Venderwood.

“Legion!!!”

Venderwood yelled with all his might.

He controlled the undead fighting each other.

Sending them into the canyon would mean victory for the rebels.

“Advance…”

“Bastard…!”

Then, a small light flew towards Venderwood.

The light pierced through Venderwood's vocal cords.

"Gurk…"

McDowell's magic.

Hastily used, it didn't have great power, but it was enough to silence him.

McDowell quickly used mana to attack Venderwood again.

But, he faced a different opponent.

"Grrr…"

"Oh no…"

The bone dragon charged at McDowell.

With the dragon's huge body charging, McDowell couldn't use other magic.

McDowell threw himself to the side to dodge the bone dragon and cursed.

'If only my arm were fine… '

If Venderwood controls the undead, it's a defeat.

He knew he could heal, but he never imagined his regeneration to be that strong.

Moreover, the bone dragon in front of him was a problem.

It was much stronger than before.

It must have been enhanced in some way.

McDowell dodged the attack and shouted loudly.

"Gracie!!!! Block it!!!!"

“Eugh…”

Gracie barely managed to get up and moved her mana.

The sparks that had spread around were long gone, and with her mana depleted, Gracie could only use small techniques.

“Electric…”

Gracie used the weakest electric magic.

“Damn…”

Venderwood took the attack head-on.

Venderwood, who had easily dodged Gracie’s strong attacks effortlessly before, had to let the attacks connect.

“Legion.”

Venderwood poured all his healing power into recovering his vocal cords.

He focused solely on healing to give commands while a desperate fight unfolded on the battlefield.

Cromwell, inside the canyon, sensed something was off.

“What’s going on?”

Despite the plan going as intended, Gracie and McDowell had not signaled victory.

Something had gone wrong.

Rudy, who was nearby, tilted his head in confusion.

“What’s happening?”

Cromwell looked at Rudy, who was helping control the camp, then turned away.

“Rudy, stay here. I’ll be right back.”

“Huh? Professor?”

Cromwell used magic to fly into the sky.

He flew quickly towards the battlefield.

“……”

He soon arrived at the battlefield and scanned the surroundings.

The undead legion trapped in the canyon was killing each other.

McDowell was still fighting the bone dragon, and Gracie was sitting, defeated, on the ground.

And then.

“Legion!!!!!!!”

He saw Venderwood, whose vocal cords had recovered.

“Sigh…”

Cromwell quickly made a decision… no, he reacted reflexively with his mana.

If that bastard shouts, if he controls the undead legion, it would be unstoppable.

The inside of the canyon was not yet ready for battle.

The original soldiers were prepared, but their numbers were far too few, and they lacked a proper commander.

They couldn’t face that massive legion.

“Gravity.”

Cromwell used telekinesis magic to send a small stone flying towards Venderwood.

The stone was small, but it flew quickly because of its size.

“Huh?”

Venderwood spotted the stone flying towards him.

It was coming at a tremendous speed, but Venderwood’s dynamic vision allowed him to see it.

A stone flying straight for his throat.

‘I can’t shout… ‘

He saw the stone, but there was no time to dodge or speak before it hit.

And he also had no confidence in recovering after being hit by the stone.

‘Aryandor… ‘

Venderwood resignedly repeated Aryandor’s name.

Then.

Thud.

A small, bouncing sound was heard.

“……?”

Someone appeared in front of Venderwood and blocked the stone thrown by Cromwell.

“Ah… Aaah…”

Gracie, sitting on the ground, saw the man.

Cromwell, floating in the sky, and McDowell, fighting the bone dragon, both of their eyes widened.

“There was no need to risk your life to break through.”

The person who appeared was Aryandor.

Cromwell clenched his teeth hard.

'Aryandor here all of a sudden… '

He was supposed to be leading the main force.

And he suddenly shows up with the vanguard?

There was no way Aryandor could have known about the vanguard's situation.

Yet, Aryandor appeared here.

"Gracie! Get out of the way!!!"

Gracie was right in front of Venderwood.

Cromwell shouted as he flew towards her.

"Ah…"

But Gracie couldn't move as Cromwell had shouted.

Aryandor quickly drew his sword and swung it.

Blood sprayed.

Gracie was cut.

"Gracie!!!!!!"

Cromwell immediately used telekinesis magic.

He sent dozens of giant rocks flying at Aryandor.

Aryandor, finding it laughable, swung his sword and cut through the rocks.

At the same time, he shouted.

"Legion. Stop."

The undead that had been killing each other stopped their movements.

“Aryandor!!!!!”

“Greetings, Vice Principal Cromwell.”

Cromwell quickly reached Gracie’s side.

And stood in front of her, facing Aryandor.

‘Blood… ‘

Gracie’s body wasn’t cut through, but she had a large sword wound on her abdomen.

A tremendous amount of blood was flowing, and leaving her like this was far too dangerous.

He wanted to take her and flee, but Aryandor was standing in the way.

Cromwell clenched his fist as he looked at Aryandor.

“How did you know to show up?”

“Do I have to tell you that?”

Aryandor said with a sneer.

But Cromwell wasn’t one to be easily intimidated.

“If you’re here, do you think the main force would be alright?”

Cromwell hadn’t failed to consider this situation.

He had even considered the scenario where Aryandor would suddenly appear on the battlefield.

The main force without Aryandor wasn’t as strong as one might think.

So, if Aryandor came here, it meant that the Royal army wouldn’t be moving towards the Academy, but the rebels’ main force would be attacked instead.

Despite Cromwell's threat, Aryandor just shrugged his shoulders, showing no particular emotion.

"Well, we'll see about that later."

Cromwell was puzzled.

What was he thinking? How had he gotten here, and what was happening with the main force?

Despite these questions, he was thinking about how to save Gracie, who lay injured.

"Vice Principal Cromwell."

As Cromwell was engulfed in confusion, Aryandor smiled.

"How about we step back for a moment?"

"…What?"

"Don't you want to save the girl below? I also want to preserve Venderwood and the undead legion. So, let's both step back and regroup."

Cromwell looked at Aryandor with disbelief.

Aryandor wore a ruthless smile.

"Not interested?"

The situation wasn't favorable for either side.

If the fight continued, the Academy's side would be breached through the canyon, and the rebels' main force would be swept away.

The battlefield would surely become chaotic, and the fight would turn into a dangerous tightrope walk.

This situation, while not welcomed by the Academy, actually favored the rebels.

Their forces being weaker than the Empire's, even a standoff was advantageous for

them, suggesting they were managing to steer the fight in their favor.

But, to retreat?

Cromwell bit his lip and pondered, then picked up Gracie from the ground.

'What are you thinking, Aryandor?'

With these thoughts, he bit his lip.

Here, no matter how much he disliked Aryandor or how incomprehensible his thoughts were, he had no choice but to accept the proposal.

"Let's do that."

"Well thought out, Vice Principal Cromwell."

At this, Aryandor smiled.

# CHAPTER 288
# COMPLETION (9)

“Ugh…”

“Professor Gracie, are you conscious?”

Gracie slowly opened her eyes in response to my question.

“Where is this…”

She regained consciousness while tossing and turning.

“…Huh? Rudy Astria?”

I was surprised to see Gracie opening her eyes wide.

Then, she looked around.

“Did I fall asleep while writing a paper? I think I had a strange dream… Something about Aryandor standing in front of me…”

“It’s not a dream. You’re fine, considering you’re talking nonsense.”

“Eh?”

Cromwell let out a sigh of relief seeing Gracie like this.

“Good. You’re alright.”

Astina looked at us with a dumbfounded expression.

“…You call this being alright?”

Gracie widened her eyes at Astina standing in front of her.

“If this isn’t a dream… No, why is Astina here…?”

Cromwell slowly began to speak.

“Astina just arrived. The Royal Army came to check on your condition briefly.”

“The Royal Army has arrived… But how did I…”

Gracie had received a severe sword wound in the middle of the battlefield.

Right in front of Aryandor, the enemy leader, no less.

In a normal situation, she wouldn’t have been able to retreat and would have faced death.

Gracie looked puzzled, as if none of this made sense to her.

“I had a talk with Aryandor.”

“Did you make some kind of contract? How did you…”

“I don’t know. It was Aryandor who made that proposal.”

We couldn’t understand it either.

About a day had passed since that battle.

The Academy managed to fend off the enemy without losing any soldiers, allowing them to catch their breath.

However, many questions remained.

Clearly, the battle would have been advantageous for the rebels.

Yet, they didn’t push on.

They even gave the Royal Army time to join forces with the Academy.

“Let’s withdraw now. Professor Gracie should rest as well.”

“Are you leaving?”

Gracie tried to get up at Astina’s words.

“Ouch!”

She immediately clutched her stomach and fell back onto the bed.

“Are you okay?”

“Ugh…”

Cromwell then spoke to Gracie.

“Gracie, you can rest. You’re not in a condition to get up.”

“But…”

“It’s okay. You’ve done what you could. You can rest now.”

Gracie bit her lip and nodded at Cromwell’s words.

Leaving Gracie behind, we left the tent where she was staying.

Astina looked around and asked Cromwell.

“What’s the situation now?”

“It’s practically impossible to lose now. The Royal Army has arrived, and we’re hearing news of victories from the Empire’s outskirts.”

The nobles who had rebelled at the Empire’s outskirts were being dealt with decisively by Ian’s forces.

“It won’t be long before Ian can join us on this front.”

“With Rudy here, Aryandor’s time magic shouldn’t be a big problem either.”

Cromwell pointed at me, standing next to him.

“What the hell are they thinking?”

“I have no idea. It would be comforting to think of them as a ragtag bunch, but they must have some sort of plan.”

Cromwell pointed towards the direction where the rebels had set their formation.

The rebels, positioned a distance away from the canyon, did not make a single move.

Even though the main force of the rebels had not yet arrived, their lack of movement was strange.

“It feels like they’re waiting for the Royal Army.”

Cromwell nodded in agreement.

“Indeed. Though I have no clue what they’re thinking.”

Cromwell and Astina fell into silence, lost in thought. I opened my mouth towards the two of them.

“Let’s focus on doing our best for now. Just in case, let’s also keep an eye on our rear.”

The sanctuary Haruna showed us.

We needed to be cautious about that place, just in case.

After all, that was the bastard’s target.

“Understood. For now, I’ll inform the professors about the rear. We’ll decide on our next steps once the battle starts. If Aryandor does not show up on the battlefield, Rudy and the troops will focus more on that side. If he does, we’ll concentrate on the front.”

“Understood.”

---

“Aryandor was with the main force?”

I frowned and looked at Astina.

“Yes, Aryandor never left that spot.”

“Are you saying there are two Aryandors?”

“I don’t know. What we saw could have been a double or perhaps an illusion created by magic.”

It was hard to believe it was just an illusion.

Surely, the Royal Army would have used magic to verify the authenticity of Aryandor’s presence, monitoring him closely.

They could have set up the main force as an illusion and attacked from another location.

Now that I think about it, it was a bit strange.

If Aryandor moved from the main force to the vanguard, how?

Even using magic, it’s impossible to announce every move during battle.

Especially since there was no one at that location capable of using such magic.

Only an army made up of undead was there.

“Using a double for oneself…”

If they had placed a double in the main force to execute some plan, they should have done it long ago.

But Aryandor didn’t do that.

Instead, they backed off.

“There’s no way to find out anything now…”

“Let’s do what we can, as I said earlier. What’s the use of worrying about something we can’t find the answer to?”

I smiled, and Astina let out a chuckle.

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s do what we have to do.”

Astina and I said this as we walked above the canyon.

---

“Aryandor was?”

“Yes.”

Compared to the Royal Army, the rebels, who joined the vanguard late, were organizing their ranks.

Meanwhile, Daemon went to find Venderwood, who was resting.

Venderwood had not healed all his wounds, but he had managed to pull himself together.

“Aryandor was with me the whole time. But what do you mean by that?”

“I saw him use time magic and wield a sword.”

“Does that mean the Aryandor outside is a fake?”

At Venderwood’s words, Daemon ran his hand through his hair.

To this, Venderwood calmly responded.

“I’m just telling you what I saw.”

With that, Daemon had nothing to say.

Venderwood was always a stoic person.

He’s someone who completely trusts Aryandor without any doubt.

If ordered to die, he would die; if ordered to live, he would live.

Being a slave originally, that mentality was deeply ingrained in him.

“Putting that aside, how are you feeling? Can you fight?”

“I can’t fight properly, but I can still move.”

“The upcoming battle will be all-out. Can you hold your ground there?”

“I will.”

Daemon closed his mouth at the response ‘I will’ instead of ‘I can’.

Venderwood’s condition was not normal.

Although Daemon didn’t particularly like Venderwood, it was a fact that his strength was beneficial to the rebels.

Losing such a force right before a total war would be devastating.

“I’ve never asked you for anything, but I’ll ask you this one thing.”

Daemon reached out his hand to Venderwood, who was sitting.

“Will you fight… until the end?”

Venderwood stared at Daemon’s hand, then grabbed it and stood up.

“There’s no need to ask that. Just command, and I will act.”

“Thank you.”

There were many questions about Aryandor, but now they were facing a major battle.

No matter how suspicious Aryandor was, facing the Royal Army was the priority.

In that sense, Venderwood’s words were incredibly reassuring.

“Daemon.”

At that moment, Aryandor entered the tent where Venderwood and Daemon were.

Aryandor was fully dressed in full plate armor, ready for battle.

“Let’s start moving now.”

“Understood.”

As they stepped outside the tent, countless soldiers, armed and ready, were waiting.

Undead and many people.

It’s unknown how many of these people will survive.

The force might be insufficient to break through the canyon guarded by the Academy.

Yet, they had to go.

Only by breaking through there could they win.

Despite his doubts about Aryandor, he was still the only key that could lead them to victory.

If he reaches the Academy, they can win, so they had no choice but to move forward.

Daemon looked at Aryandor.

They had fought and won many battles together, defeating corrupt nobles and rescuing the oppressed people under them.

So, this time too.

He would willingly sacrifice his own life if needed.

He hoped to bring victory to the people in front of them.

“Aryandor. Shall we go?”

Daemon did not ask about what Venderwood had said.

What's the point of asking now?

They hadn't talked about it on the way here either.

They had decided to trust and follow Aryandor for this battle.

So, there was no need to raise any objections.

"Yes, then."

Aryandor put on the helmet set beside him.

Then he walked forward, through the soldiers.

"Let's go."

# CHAPTER 289
# COMPLETION (10)

Right at the edge of the canyon.

A dense crowd of people stood on the vast meadow.

No, to be precise, it wasn't just people.

Skeletons clattering their jawbones and bone dragons of enormous size, among other various types of undead, were also present.

I crouched at the top of the canyon, looking down at the scene.

"So damn many of them."

"Even if there are many, we have the upper hand in terms of terrain."

Cromwell, standing behind me, said with a laugh.

I looked at Cromwell.

"Professor Cromwell, have you ever experienced war?"

"Yes. Chased around that guy Robert a few times."

"Have you faced a war of this magnitude?"

"No. There's probably no one alive who has experienced a war of this scale."

The largest scale war within the Empire.

It was certain to be brutal.

From the start of the war until its end.

Blood of many would flow, and screams of agony would be heard.

“Is it possible to negotiate and not fight now?”

“If that were possible, we wouldn’t have come this far.”

I knew this fact.

Even after the Empire sent many proposals for negotiation, there was no answer or counterproposal; instead, the messenger’s head was sent back.

I clenched my fist and stepped forward.

“I’ll try to end this as quickly as possible.”

There was only one way to solve all these problems.

Aryandor.

If that person died, we could end this war.

We could reduce the number of deaths.

Pooo—

The resonant sound of a horn bellowed.

The massive rebel army moved.

“Rudy, I’m counting on you.”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

Cromwell then went down.

From the top of the canyon, I focused on just one person.

“Aryandor.”

It was time to end this fight.

---

“Advance!!!”

The rebels, led by the undead, moved forward.

Daemon commanded them, looking up at the canyon.

The Royal troops were waiting above the canyon.

A strategy of entering where the enemy opens its mouth.

There would be many sacrifices, but if they could break through, victory was assured.

If they could break through… that is.

“Go!!!”

“Kaaaah!”

“Krkk…!!”

Thud thud thud!

With Daemon’s shout, the undead charged.

Not just skeletons but also large undead shook the ground with their charge.

The Royal troops above the canyon swallowed their saliva, watching the undead’s charge.

And they silently waited.

“Vice Commander.”

“Not yet.”

Astina was quietly observing the charge.

And when they reached the front of the canyon.

“Attack!!!!!!”

She shouted loudly.

At the same time, other soldiers also shouted.

“Attack!!!!”

“Attack!!!”

A barrage of arrows and spells swirled through the air.

“Argh!!”

“Fireball!”

“Fire Field!”

Arrows poured onto the bodies of the undead, and magic covered them.

The battlefield, quiet just moments ago, turned into a hell of fire.

But that didn’t stop their advance.

The undead marched forward, even as the path ahead turned into a sea of flames.

Though their bodies burned and fell, they pressed on.

“Rrrr!”

Then, one undead charged forward.

This undead had incredibly large hands for its size.

“Raa!”

Using its large hands, the undead pushed the burning corpses aside, clearing a path.

With a way through, the undead started running forward again.

“Fire!”

But the Royal troops weren’t just watching.

Some soldiers shot arrows at the undead that had broken through.

“Raaaghh!”

Despite being hit by a few small arrows relative to its size, the undead thrashed violently.

And then.

Boom!!!

An explosion occurred, turning the surroundings into chaos.

Daemon grimaced at the sight.

The arrows fired by the Royal troops were enchanted.

Such arrows, costly as they were, were not used carelessly. Yet, the Royal troops used them boldly from the start.

“Are they saying they won’t let us get close at all?”

Daemon stretched his hand forward.

“Bone Wall.”

A wall of bones rose from the side of the canyon.

The arrows and spells falling from above were blocked by this wall.

But only for a moment.

Astina, who was above the canyon, jumped down.

“Gravity.”

Crash!

Using her magic, Astina pressed down on the wall.

The wall shattered, and fragments fell below.

“Raa!”

The walls, meant to block the attack, fell onto the undead, and the charging undead were pressed to the ground.

“Move all you want, but you have to get through our attacks first.”

Astina, flying in the sky, said to Daemon.

“Bone Spear.”

Without responding, Daemon immediately used magic.

Bone spears flew into the sky, aiming at Astina.

But they didn’t reach her.

The spears flying swiftly towards Astina were all pushed away as they got near her.

“Did you think that would hit?”

Daemon quietly uttered after watching Astina.

“Ogre.”

Astina looked puzzled by the meaningless word, but soon realized what it meant.

“Already using that guy?”

“If the Vice Commander has appeared, we should also provide a matching welcome.”

Far away, a bone dragon flew high.

The creature took a deep breath.

“But, you’re not the only ones with a dragon.”

Then, from the direction of the canyon, another dragon soared into the sky.

Rudy had called forth a Red Dragon, named Yongyong.

Yongyong inhaled deeply and aimed its mouth towards the bone dragon.

And at the same time.

——!

It unleashed its breath attack.

The poison breath from the bone dragon clashed with Yongyong’s fire breath, creating a massive collision.

The clash generated a huge shockwave, and the attacks started to scatter around.

The Empire’s side was hit by fire breath, while the rebels were hit by poison breath.

“Oh, it’s coming…!”

As the soldiers were shocked by the giant attack, one person from each side of the Empire and rebels jumped out.

“Gravity Barrier.”

“Royal Swordsmanship. Moonlight.”

On the rebels’ side, Venderwood used his sword energy to slice through the breath, and on the Empire’s side, Cromwell stepped forward to block the attack.

Astina smiled upon seeing this.

“Using Royal Swordsmanship against the Royal troops…”

Daemon responded.

“Are the most hypocritical ones speaking?”

“Hypocritical? Do you really not know who the truly hypocritical ones are?”

“It’s you. You nobles who are busy protecting your own positions while claiming to protect the people.”

Astina was taken aback by Daemon’s words.

“Us? When have we ever been busy protecting our positions? Ridiculous. If anything, you’re the ones obsessed with blood.”

After becoming the Vice Commander of the Royal troops, Astina had done everything possible to prevent this war.

She had even considered negotiating with the rebels, offering them land and the chance to become an independent region.

But, the rebels rejected everything.

And not just any rejection.

They mocked the Empire by sending back the heads of the messengers.

They were instigating war without proposing anything to the Empire.

“Ha…! Have you ever tried to listen to us? Not even pretending to consider it, you just wage war?”

That’s when Astina realized something was off.

“Not listening…?”

“You who have never proposed negotiations or sent emissaries…”

“What?”

Astina’s eyes widened.

‘Something’s wrong.’

“Could you possibly…”

“Royal Swordsmanship.”

Then, a voice came from behind.

“Crescent Moon.”

A massive sword strike flew towards Astina.

“Ugh…!”

Astina moved her body using telekinesis.

‘Aryandor… ‘

Aryandor was there, where the sword strike came from.

Holding a sword, Aryandor stepped forward and spoke.

“Daemon. There’s no time for chatter.”

“Understood.”

Daemon briefly bowed his head and moved his mana.

“Ugh…”

Astina frowned.

A massive mana began to move.

It wasn’t a small spell they were trying to use.

With that amount of mana…

‘I need to block it… ‘

Just as they were moving the mana.

Thump!

A sound of someone kicking off the ground echoed from above the canyon.

Despite the noisy battlefield, both Daemon and Astina looked up upon hearing the sound.

A man was leaping down from above the canyon.

It was Rudy Astria.

“Ugh…”

Seeing Rudy, Daemon immediately redirected his mana.

If Rudy Astria approached while he was casting a spell, he would surely be at a disadvantage.

“Bone Wall! Barrier!”

Daemon used magic to shield himself.

Then he prepared another spell.

‘If he breaks through the shield… ‘

He intended to counterattack immediately with magic.

However.

“…?”

Rudy, coming down from the canyon, wasn’t heading towards Daemon.

Ignoring Daemon, the soldiers around, and everyone else, Rudy dashed towards one person.

“Aryandor!!!!!”

“Ha…”

Aryandor made a disbelieving face as he saw Rudy charging towards him.

He was in the middle of the battlefield, surrounded by soldiers.

Rudy, paying no heed to such things, headed straight for Aryandor.

“Northern Swordsmanship.”

Aryandor quietly held his sword and faced Rudy.

“Inhale…”

Rudy too inhaled deeply and filled his fist with mana.

“Bluebird.”

Aryandor launched a blue sword energy forward, and Rudy extended his fist, exploding the mana forward.

# CHAPTER 290
# COMPLETION (11)

Two forces collided: a blue sword energy and a silver-colored mana.

It was the power of Aryandor and Rudy clashing.

Astina watched the scene.

“Rudy’s power…”

Rudy’s mana pierced through Aryandor’s sword energy. It was much stronger than Aryandor’s attack.

“Has he grown this much in a month? No…”

Even though Rudy’s power had increased, such strength seemed impossible.

His opponent was Aryandor. Astina, having seen his power firsthand, sensed something was off. Rudy’s newfound strength couldn’t possibly overwhelm Aryandor to this extent.

“Is Aryandor’s power weaker?”

Not only had Rudy become stronger, but Aryandor’s power also seemed weaker from before.

Astina wasn’t the only one feeling this way.

“Aryandor?”

Daemon too was shocked by the scene.

Aryandor was being overpowered by Rudy, which made no sense.

Rudy was dangerous not because he could beat Aryandor but because he could block

Aryandor's time magic.

Everyone thought Aryandor was originally the stronger one. This situation was abnormal.

Aryandor's power was weaker than usual, despite him sustaining no injuries for a month. There was no reason for his power to suddenly decline.

Was he deliberately holding back? That too made no sense.

Taking Rudy's attack head-on would harm both the soldiers around and Aryandor himself.

Ignoring the attack just to save some strength was foolish.

"What's happening here…"

Daemon, bewildered, snapped back to reality.

"We need to block the attack."

If Aryandor's attack failed, Rudy's would engulf the surroundings, harming both the soldiers and Aryandor.

Daemon reached out, attempting to manipulate mana, when a man burst forth from behind Aryandor.

"Royal swordsmanship, Half Moon."

The man, wielding a large greatsword, pushed back Rudy's attack. It was Venderwood.

After blocking Rudy's attack, Venderwood approached Aryandor.

"Aryandor, are you alright?"

"Yes, thanks to you."

Rudy landed and looked at Venderwood and Aryandor.

“?”

Rudy tilted his head, confused.

Everyone felt something was off, but Rudy, who had launched the attack, felt it most acutely.

His attack wasn’t that strong. Aryandor should have easily countered it.

In previous fights with Aryandor, Rudy felt like he was up against an insurmountable wall. Despite attempting attacks and counters with powerful techniques, Rudy never felt he could win.

But this Aryandor was different.

He was just ordinary.

I couldn’t feel Aryandor’s unique aura.

Rudy thought of something.

Two Aryandors.

It was a conversation he had with Astina.

“How could Aryandor be in two places at once, with both the advance party and the main force?”

Then, Aryandor drew his sword.

“Royal swordsmanship, Full Moon.”

Rudy clenched his fist.

Aryandor’s golden sword energy flew toward him. It was weak.

“Ah!”

Rudy exploded with mana, pushing away Aryandor’s sword energy, and charged in.

“Block him!”

As Rudy rushed toward Aryandor, the surrounding soldiers tried to stop him.

“Priscilla, Behemoth.”

“A summon!”

“Block him! We have to stop him!”

As the soldiers moved, Rudy spoke again.

“Behemoth, return to your original size.”

“Puu~.”

Boom—

“Ah…?”

“What is that?”

With Rudy’s words, Behemoth’s body grew larger.

Its body was big enough to rival that of an original dragon.

A giant elephant appeared on the battlefield.

“Run away!”

“No! Block it! We must block it!”

The soldiers were in total disarray, unable to even think of stopping Rudy.

In that chaos, Rudy only looked at Aryandor.

“Ah…”

Rudy again filled his hand with mana and looked ahead.

As he was about to punch Aryandor, Venderwood appeared by Aryandor's side.

"Move."

"You can't get through."

After a brief exchange, Rudy manipulated mana.

"Spatial Severance."

"!"

Spatial Severance was a technique that required casting time.

It was an easy technique to avoid.

But the Spatial Severance happening right in front of them now was unavoidable.

Several rifts formed around Venderwood.

Under normal circumstances, Venderwood could have avoided them, but his injuries were too severe to escape this attack.

"Cough…"

Rudy quickly overcame Venderwood and headed toward Aryandor behind him.

"Aryandor."

"Come on, then."

Aryandor, standing behind, smiled and directed his sword at Rudy.

Aryandor's sword energy and Rudy's punch swung at each other.

Boom!!!

The collision of sword energy and mana caused an explosion.

The sand on the ground was blown away, creating a dust storm.

As visibility was obscured, Rudy spoke.

“Lich.”

Clink, clink.

Suddenly, the sound of chains.

Behind Aryandor, a demon wrapped in chains and holding a giant scythe appeared.

The demon quickly moved the chains.

The chains moved towards Aryandor, attempting to bind him.

“Swing the White Sword.”

The sword swung as if it split into dozens of blades.

The sword energy, enveloped in dozens of swords, cut through all the chains surrounding Aryandor, who then looked at Rudy in front of him.

“Royal swordsmanship…”

And as he was about to swing his sword,

Rudy asked,

“Who are you?”

As soon as Aryandor heard Rudy’s words, he swung his sword.

“Quick Blade.”

Aryandor’s swiftly moving sword grazed Rudy’s cheek.

Seeing this, Aryandor, with a sneer, said to Rudy,

“Do you not even know who’s standing in front of you?”

Rudy gestured towards Aryandor with his chin.

“Take a look at your legs and tell me.”

Aryandor looked down.

The armor around Aryandor’s legs was slightly damaged.

That part of the leg…

Should have been where Aryandor’s prosthetic leg was, yet there was a perfectly intact leg there.

“When did it get broken?”

“Well, I guess you don’t need to answer that.”

Rudy turned around and shouted loudly,

“Astina!!!”

Startled by the sudden shout, Astina’s eyes widened.

Before she could respond, Rudy shouted again,

“It’s a trap!!!”

“What?”

As Rudy shouted, Aryandor charged at him.

At the same time, he said,

“Help Venderwood.”

“Understood.”

Simultaneously, two people rushed at Rudy.

Seeing this, Astina moved quickly.

“Help Rudy!”

Astina shouted as she tried to move.

But someone moved before her.

“Rudy Astria!!”

Cromwell flew down from above towards Rudy.

“Gravity.”

Cromwell pressed down both Aryandor and Venderwood at the same time.

“Ugh…”

“Go, Rudy. I’ll take care of this.”

Rudy nodded to Cromwell, who had come to his aid.

“Please.”

Rudy left Cromwell in charge and retreated.

“Rudy! What’s happening?”

“I must go ahead.”

“What do you mean? Where are you going?”

“To the Academy. I need to go to the Academy.”

“What?”

Astina looked at Rudy with surprise, then clenched her mouth tightly.

“Alright. I understand.”

Astina nodded without asking for any explanations.

There was no reason to hold him back when he was so insistent.

“Then we’ll take care of things here.”

“Are you sure you can?”

“Who do you think I am?”

Astina said with a smile.

It was a more reassuring smile than ever before.

“Thank you.”

“Thankful? Please.”

Rudy said as he hugged Astina.

“Ru, Rudy?”

Astina’s eyes widened in surprise at the sudden embrace on the battlefield.

“What is this? This is war…”

Rudy released Astina, who was stammering with laughter, from his embrace.

Astina, her face flushed red, couldn’t hide her flustered expression and blankly stared at Rudy.

“I’ll see you after this is all over. Take care. I won’t let it go if you get hurt.”

Leaving Astina behind, Rudy immediately moved on.

“…”

Astina blankly looked in the direction Rudy disappeared to and then smiled warmly.

“Don’t you get hurt either.”

Muttering to herself, Astina turned around.

Behind her were countless troops.

Astina reached out to the sky.

From her hand, a small flame burst forth and exploded in the sky, signaling like a flare.

It was part of the plan prepared by Cromwell and Astina.

They were meant to be the last resort, but she decided to call them a bit early.

After sending the signal, Astina stepped forward.

“Then, I should make my move too.”

---

Bang!

A firework exploded in the distance.

Someone was watching it.

“Isn’t it a bit early?”

“Problems happen in war all the time.”

“Why should I, a princess, have to follow orders?”

“In a war, there are no princesses. Just individuals.”

“You’re talking back a lot more than usual?”

“…”

“Fine. Let’s just do as we’re told.”

The woman who spoke was Rie Von Ristonia, the Empire’s first princess.

And the man following her was Locke Lucarion, the guardian of the north from the Lucarion family.

“Let’s go!”

At Rie’s command, the soldiers behind her moved to follow her.

# CHAPTER 291
# COMPLETION (12)

“Block him, Daemon,”

Aryandor said upon seeing Rudy heading towards the academy.

“Bone Spear.”

Following this, Daemon attempted to stop Rudy’s movement using mana.

However, he couldn’t stop Rudy.

“Gravity.”

Astina pressed down on the spear flying towards Rudy.

“Don’t you have someone else to fight?”

Astina asked with a smile.

“Ugh…”

Astina glanced at Aryandor.

Seeing Aryandor react like that confirmed it was definitely a good situation.

But that didn’t change the situation on the battlefield.

With Rudy gone, there could be a gap.

I signaled the hidden troops, so we could hold on, but the disruption to the original plan was problematic.

Daemon felt the same.

He knew Aryandor was up to something, but he never imagined the enemy would realize it first.

'But.'

The primary goal for the rebels was to break through the canyon.

Even without precise knowledge of the inside, the situation was clearly good.

'To maintain this situation.'

Daemon made a quick decision.

To keep the situation on the battlefield, Cromwell and Astina had to be held back.

That way, the undead could dig through the canyon.

Daemon reached towards the ground.

"O beings at life's end, receive my power and become one with me."

The ground then began to stir.

Bodies around started gathering towards Daemon.

Astina frowned at this sight.

Though she didn't know what magic it was, it was related to necromancy.

It had to be blocked.

"Gravity Field!"

Astina tried to block the stirring bodies around with magic, but Daemon shook his head.

"It's no use."

Bodies were gathering.

Not just the bodies of those who had died on the battlefield, but also those beneath the canyon's ground and nearby.

All started to rise.

Even as Astina tried to block with magic, the bodies resisted, twisting their bones to stand.

'Is he creating undead?'

Normally, creating undead like this wouldn't be significant.

Such undead are numerous but lack quality, easily annihilated in an instant.

However, something was off.

"Bones and flesh shall become one, and their bodies shall come to me."

Daemon continued his incantation.

The gathered corpses melted as if they had entered a furnace, gradually merging into one large mass.

"What the hell…"

"Monster?"

The soldiers widened their eyes at the sight.

The corpses melted and became one, forming a large body that began to lift Daemon high off the ground.

The mass gradually took on a human form, resembling a giant.

"That is…"

Astina recognized something like this.

It was similar to the undead caught by Professor Robert on their way back from visiting the Railer family with Luna.

A monster with a huge body that kept regenerating.

“It was similar.”

“There shall be one death.”

Daemon finished the incantation.

“Rising Titan.”

A giant appeared in the middle of the battlefield.

It was a monster made of corpses and clumps of earth and dirt, clinging to Daemon as if they had become one.

“This seems stronger than what we saw before.”

Astina sighed.

Thanks to Professor Robert, she knew how to fight this kind of monster.

A monster that keeps regenerating even when its body is cut.

Therefore, its core had to be targeted.

“Astina! What’s going on here?”

Cromwell, who was dealing with Aryandor and Venderwood, stepped back and asked Astina.

“It’s a monster created by a necromancer.”

“Necromancy?”

“This is going to be a headache.”

It was impossible to stop it alone.

Well, to be precise, it could be stopped, but it couldn’t be killed.

But leaving it alone was not an option either.

This was a battlefield.

People would continue to die, and this giant would use them as nourishment to grow even larger.

So, it must be destroyed.

“Professor, can you help?”

“I could help, but…”

Cromwell looked down.

He saw Venderwood and the fake Aryandor.

Although Aryandor was a fake, he was far stronger than ordinary soldiers, and even the professors could not stand against him.

“Shouldn’t we leave them to those guys?”

Astina pointed to the meadow far away on the opposite side of the canyon.

Soldiers coming from where the rebels had come, on the other side of the canyon.

The northern army led by Rie had arrived on the battlefield.

“Can we trust them with this?”

“Yes, they are reliable.”

“What about the back then?”

The outside of the canyon was one thing, but the inside was also a problem.

As the undead continued to enter, someone was needed to stop them.

“Isn’t Professor Mcguire there? And him.”

“Him?”

“The one who is extremely effective against the undead.”

The technique that is extremely effective against the undead.

The one who possesses it.

That was Evan.

Evan’s nature magic was the polar opposite of necromancy, capable of dealing lethal damage to the undead.

Cromwell nodded after hearing Astina’s words.

“Alright, we’ll do as you say.”

Astina smiled at Cromwell’s response.

“Listening to your disciple won’t do you any harm.”

“Yeah, let’s see how great my disciple is.”

With that, Cromwell and Astina looked at the giant in front of them.

---

In front of the academy.

A man looked up at the academy from its entrance.

“Is there a barrier put up?”

The man was not alone.

Another person, with their face hidden under a hood, was with him.

They stood at the entrance of the academy, unable to enter because of the barrier.

“Who’s there!”

A middle-aged man came out from the inside of the academy as he saw someone lurking around.

“Hmm…?”

“I asked who you are! Reveal your identity!”

The middle-aged man demanded, on guard.

Thump!

“Can you lift this barrier?”

The man standing in front of the academy asked, tapping the barrier with his hand.

“What?”

The middle-aged man looked at him as if he were absurd.

As he stared at the man’s face, the middle-aged man’s eyes widened.

That face was all too familiar and should not have been seen.

“Aryandor?”

The middle-aged man quickly began to manipulate mana, adopting a defensive posture.

“Oh, when guests arrive, one should think about how to treat them. Aren’t you supposed to be a professor or something? Haven’t you learned that?”

Aryandor said with a sneering smile.

“How can you be here…”

The middle-aged man knew there was a war going on in the canyon and thought the academy would be safe.

He was greatly mistaken.

If Cromwell had not activated the academy's barrier in advance, the inside would have been a mess.

The middle-aged man, somewhat relieved, looked at Aryandor.

"But, I really don't want to waste my energy here, so could you open this barrier?"

"Nonsense! Get lost. This is not a place you can enter!"

"Hmm… No reward for it, is that it? How about this? If you open the barrier, I'll let you live."

The middle-aged man couldn't keep up with Aryandor's self-absorbed talk.

What on earth was he talking about?

The middle-aged man then raised his hand to the sky.

A red light emanated from his hand.

It was a signal prearranged with the people inside the academy.

'But who is that person behind him?'

The middle-aged man was more concerned about the person behind Aryandor than Aryandor himself.

Even though the person's identity was hidden by the hood, it gave off an ominous feeling.

The middle-aged man shook his head, thinking over the situation.

He needed to come up with a plan for Aryandor.

'He cannot enter.'

The middle-aged man, sweating, looked at Aryandor.

Seeing him stand in front of the academy like that, he couldn't easily break through the barrier.

Of course, breaking through the barrier shouldn't have been possible.

The barrier Cromwell had erected was a legacy passed down through generations.

It was a relic left by ancestors to protect the academy.

No matter how powerful Aryandor was, he shouldn't have been able to enter through a barrier created by the collective effort of dozens of ancestors.

However,

"Hmm… Are you saying you won't open the barrier even after what I said? Then."

Aryandor moved his hand towards the barrier, manipulating mana.

"When I enter, you'll be the first to die."

"…What?"

Aryandor's mana stirred, and the surroundings flickered.

"Time Back."

And then,

The barrier disappeared as if it had never been there.

"Hmm, it seems like the barrier was made with magical artifacts after all?"

Aryandor stepped forward into the academy.

He naturally entered the inside as if nothing had been blocking the way from the start.

The person in the hood followed him inside.

"Ah… Ah…"

The middle-aged man trembled and stepped back.

“As promised.”

Aryandor drew his sword.

“You’ll be the first to die.”

# CHAPTER 292
# COMPLETION (13)

“Attack!!!”

Rie, at the rear of the rebels, shouted to the soldiers.

As she shouted, she wondered,

‘Is this really okay?’

Originally, Rie’s role was to encircle the enemy completely.

When the rebels failed to break through the canyon ahead, they planned to capture all the fleeing enemies.

Though the order was issued a bit early, capturing all those troops seemed like a tough task.

“We’ll have to reduce their forces as much as possible,”

Rie said, looking at Locke beside her.

“Understood. Let’s do that,”

Locke replied, then dashed forward, running faster than the soldiers and shouting,

“For the Empire’s eternal glory!”

“Glory!”

Locke led the troops, boosting their morale.

Thus, the northern soldiers collided with the rebel troops.

“Argh!”

“Block them!”

The rebel soldiers shouted, trying to stop them, but the northern soldiers’ strength was overwhelming.

Ordinary soldiers fought like knights, each against three or four enemies.

“Is that the level of a soldier?”

“It’s magic tools! They’re equipped with magic tools!”

The reason for their strength was precisely the magic tools.

The magic tools provided by the Empire’s Magic Tower.

Armors engraved with strengthening magic, swords with lightening magic, and various other magic tools were at their disposal.

With the already experienced Northern Army equipped with magic tools, they became soldiers worth a hundred men each.

“Princess…!”

Seeing this, Venderwood walked towards Rie, who was standing far away.

“Capture the commanders!”

The Northern Army rushed towards Venderwood.

“Interference.”

Venderwood swung his sword at the approaching soldiers.

“Argh!”

“Block!”

Even though they were equipped with magic tools, ordinary soldiers couldn’t stand against Venderwood.

Locke saw the soldiers being cut down by Venderwood's sword and immediately ran towards him.

"Northern swordsmanship, Blue Blade."

A blue sword energy flew towards Venderwood.

Venderwood swung his great sword, wrapped in sword energy, cutting through the blue blade.

"…The guardian's son?"

The guardian referred to Locke's father, the guardian of the north.

Locke responded,

"I am now the guardian."

Though Locke hadn't officially inherited the Lord's position, he was virtually no different from a Lord.

He took care of the domain's affairs and was equal or superior in strength to his father.

The reason he hadn't inherited the domain was merely because he hadn't graduated from the academy yet.

"Is that so."

Venderwood held his sword with a calm face.

"Then come at me, guardian."

Locke prepared to charge with his sword.

Then,

"Hey."

"…?"

A voice came from behind Locke.

That was Rie's voice.

Venderwood furrowed his brow.

Rie was supposed to be quite a distance away.

He hesitated for a moment, surprised she had gotten so close so quickly.

"What's the matter?"

"You, what did you say?"

"?"

"Didn't you tell the soldiers to advance? Why are they getting held back by this guy?"

"But…"

"I'll take care of this guy."

Rie, manipulating her mana, looked at Venderwood.

"I owe this guy one."

When the rebels attacked the academy, Rie had been defeated by Venderwood.

As a result, Yuni had been put in danger.

Rie hadn't forgotten that.

She constantly played it back, dwelling on the feeling of defeat and training hard.

Just as Rudy had changed, so had Rie, all to get back at this guy.

"What are you doing?"

Rie hit Locke on the back.

Locke, looking puzzled for a moment, then ran towards where the soldiers were. Rie watched Locke run off into the distance and then turned her head.

“You said you were a slave, right?”

Venderwood, confused by Rie’s sudden question, nodded anyway.

“Yes, as you know, I’m a Princess and soon to be Empress. Normally, just meeting me should move you to tears. But let’s skip all that today.”

Rie rolled up her sleeves and threw off cumbersome decorations to the ground.

“Forget about status and all, just throw everything aside and fight.”

Red light gleamed in Rie’s eyes.

Venderwood flinched at the sight of Rie smiling.

She was different from before.

Rie wasn’t on the throne yet and was still young.

Yet, she had an overwhelming presence.

And that wasn’t all. She exuded the air and composure of a veteran warrior.

“I wonder if you know how much I’ve wanted to fight you.”

Rie stretched her arms to the sky and manipulated her mana.

“Light that illuminates the world, come to this place.”

Rie’s mana rose to the sky through her arms.

Red energies twirled upwards, forming a large flame above, like the sun.

Rie whispered,

“Helios.”

Venderwood stared blankly at Rie's flames.

Rie then said to Venderwood,

"Let's settle the score for hurting my sister."

---

Meanwhile, at the academy.

"Block them!"

"Protect the students! Evacuate them!"

An emergency signal went off at the academy. The students were sent to safety, and the professors came forward, risking their lives.

"How long do you plan to hold out? Do you think holding out will let you do anything?"

Aryandor faced the professors with a relaxed expression.

The professors were no match for Aryandor.

Most professors remaining at the rear specialized in research.

This was because the professors capable of fighting were already on the battlefield.

"What will you do?"

The professors spoke quietly while facing Aryandor.

"Can Professor Gracie fight?"

"It doesn't look likely. Her condition is currently not good. And even if Professor Gracie was in her normal state, this guy…"

The professors had already unleashed several attacks on Aryandor.

However, Aryandor hadn't fallen.

In fact, he hadn't even received a scratch.

The professors' attacks were all nullified by Aryandor's time magic.

Aryandor's attacks were not weak either.

His attacks, involving dozens of sword techniques, were unpredictable and each strike was lethal.

The professors, quick to judge, had already concluded the outcome of this fight in their minds.

Defeat.

The word filled the professors' heads.

Still, they had to hold out.

It was uncertain whether they could afford to do so on the battlefield, but they had to wait for reinforcements.

As the professors were thinking this, Aryandor spoke up.

"Let me make you an offer."

The professors listened.

"Saint Haruna is here, isn't she?"

Silence fell on the professors' side.

"Just tell me where she is, and I'll spare your lives and those of the students hiding far away."

Everyone's lives could be spared.

By sacrificing just one person.

"How about it? It's quite an enticing offer, isn't it?"

Aryandor smirked coldly.

Sacrifice Haruna.

Then everyone's lives…

Upon this, the professors fell into a dilemma, but one of them spoke up.

"We refuse."

"What?"

Aryandor looked at the people beside him.

They, too, stared back at Aryandor with stern eyes.

"So you're saying you all choose to die?"

Aryandor spoke with a face that couldn't understand.

Yet, the professors' opinion did not change.

Aryandor ground his teeth.

"So you're pretending to be noble? You're not like that. Sacrificing one for the sake of everyone…"

Aryandor began to say something incomprehensible and then closed his mouth.

"So… you've decided to make that decision."

He drew his sword.

"Then die. All of you."

---

After Aryandor and the professors began their fight,

"Saint, will you just stay here?"

“Yes.”

“But… Aryandor is coming…!”

“I can’t leave this place.”

A slight argument was happening in the student council office.

This conversation was between Haruna, who was determined to protect the sacred place, and Yuni, who was trying to convince her to escape.

Yuni tried everything to make Haruna flee, but Haruna wouldn’t budge.

So, Yuni could only pace anxiously.

“We could escape now and plan later…”

“There won’t be a later. Once this place is overtaken, it’s over.”

“What?”

After pondering Haruna’s words for a moment, Yuni asked,

“Did you see the future?”

“I won’t talk about that. Staying here is the best option for now.”

Yuni sighed deeply and sat down after staring at Haruna for a while.

Seeing Yuni sit, Haruna quietly said,

“How about you run away, Yuni?”

“How can I run if you don’t? I’d surely get a scolding from my senior if I ran away now.”

Haruna asked,

“Are you afraid of getting scolded?”

“I’m not afraid of being scolded. Getting scolded by my senior is almost a daily thing. But I’m really scared of my senior disliking me.”

Yuni shuddered at the thought, and Haruna smiled gently.

“You must really like Rudy.”

“Of course. But I wonder if that blockhead senior knows how much I care about him.”

“He knows. Very well. It’s just that the timing doesn’t allow for expression.”

“Really? To me, it seems like he’s just clueless.”

“Well, I can’t say he isn’t clueless.”

Yuni and Haruna continued their chat, sitting on the floor. This conversation somewhat eased the tension.

“Ah! Since you can see the future, why don’t you take a look? We’re going to keep hiding here anyway. What happens between me and senior in the future?”

“The future, you say.”

“Ah, right. You said you can’t see the process… Just the outcome, then! Will we be holding hands, going on dates, maybe even kissing…”

Haruna listened to Yuni with a stern face, then smiled gently.

“I think we’re a little too relaxed.”

“Eh? Are you changing the subject?”

“If I start looking into personal futures like that, there’d be no end to it.”

“That’s stingy of you, Saint. You’ve looked into your own future, haven’t you?”

“I have… And that’s why it shouldn’t be done.”

“…What?”

Thud.

Then, a rumbling sound was heard.

Haruna quickly moved to cover Yuni's mouth with her hand.

"Mmph…!"

"Let's be quiet for a moment."

Haruna listened attentively to the sounds outside, remaining silent.

"Where… Haruna… must find…"

A faint voice was heard.

It was Aryandor's voice. Aryandor had arrived on this floor.

'But he doesn't know we're here.'

Aryandor didn't know where the entrance to the sanctuary was.

That's why he was searching for Haruna.

Using the Saint, there was a way to find the sanctuary.

After holding their breath for a few seconds, no more sounds came from outside. Haruna sighed in relief and let go of Yuni.

"…Did he leave?"

"It looks like it…"

Suddenly, a tremendous explosion occurred.

The entire floor's rooms were split in half. The walls crumbled down, and all the rooms were exposed.

"What the…"

If they had been standing up even slightly, they would have been split in half.

More than that, the sheer power left them speechless.

The sword's force had sliced the entire floor in half, and they were astounded.

"Ah. Found you."

Then a voice was heard.

It was Aryandor's.

"Why are you trying so hard to hide? You were bound to be found eventually."

Aryandor, covered in blood, seemed to have killed many people on his way here.

"Uh…"

Haruna stepped back, biting her lip.

"Do you know how long I've been searching for you? It's been over five years already."

Aryandor broke through the walls and entered the student council office where Haruna was.

'Too fast.'

She hadn't expected to be found this quickly.

'I must hold out somehow… '

Haruna thought.

Was there a way to escape Aryandor in this place?

Haruna didn't have the ability to fight.

Physically, she was far inferior to Aryandor.

Even if she ran, she would be caught quickly.

So then… what to do…

As she pondered,

“Excuse me. Following someone around for 5 years? That’s stalking. It’s a crime, you know.”

Yuni, who was beside Haruna, stepped forward.

Aryandor tilted his head in confusion at Yuni’s appearance.

“…And who are you?”

Haruna was too terrified to speak properly.

Yet, this small girl stood up boldly.

“Y-Yuni… W-we need to r-run…”

“It’s okay. I don’t abandon friends.”

Yuni turned back, smiling, and said,

“I’ll protect you…”

Despite her words, Yuni’s legs and hands were trembling.

Aryandor narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

“You think you can stop me?”

“Why are you using informal language from the get-go? You’re quite rude.”

Aryandor was taken aback by Yuni’s response.

“If you just hand her over, I could spare your life?”

“Do you really think I would do that?”

“Choosing death even when you have a chance to live?”

“No, what I chose isn’t death. I’m simply doing what needs to be done. As the Student Council President, I have a duty to protect everyone inside the academy.”

Aryandor lifted his sword.

“So, being the current Student Council President means you’re the second Princess.”

“You know about that?”

“I’m curious what expression Rudy Astria will make when you die.”

At that, Yuni’s expression hardened.

“…Hearing about Rudy from you really puts me in a bad mood.”

“So, what are you going to do?”

Yuni manipulated her mana.

“I’ll fight.”

Aryandor smirked.

“Go ahead, try.”

“Stop right there!”

Suddenly, a woman’s voice came from the other end of the corridor.

“Am I… too late? Oh, maybe not?”

The woman spoke with a slightly flustered voice.

Her entrance was clumsy for what was quite a dramatic arrival.

Yuni looked towards the source of the unexpected voice.

“Huh?”

The owner of the voice coming from the end of the corridor was.

“Hey! Yuni! Are you okay?”

It was Luna Railer, an apprentice wizard from the Magic Tower.

# CHAPTER 293
# COMPLETION (14)

Luna couldn't originally participate in the war.

Unlike Astina or Rie, she had no responsibilities to bear.

She was merely an apprentice wizard, the heir to a very small territory, and a student at the academy.

With such status, she couldn't take part in the war.

Moreover, the Magic Tower recognized her as a great talent.

If Luna were to be seriously injured in the war, it would be a significant loss for the Magic Tower.

So, from the Empire's standpoint, it wasn't beneficial either. So the Magic Tower prevented Luna from going to the battlefield.

A few days before the war started,

Franz, the Empire's head wizard, summoned Luna.

"…You called for me?"

"Luna, you look down."

"How could I not be when all my friends are fighting?"

Luna appeared unusually dispirited.

Part of the reason for her semi-imprisonment was the fear that she might flee to the battlefield.

Though confining her might seem excessive, she had repeatedly caused a commotion

by asking to be sent to the battlefield, so everyone considered it a justified measure.

Tap tap.

Franz tapped his fingers on the desk, observing Luna, then spoke quietly.

“Do you want to go there that badly?”

“…?”

Franz sighed and handed her a piece of paper.

“This is…”

“A request for assistance from the Empire. They want us to supply equipment to the Northern Army.”

Luna was puzzled by his statement.

“To supply that equipment, someone from the Magic Tower must go, right? Do you understand what I’m implying?”

Luna brightened at that.

“Can I, can I go?”

“What’s so joyful about going to a battlefield…”

“I can protect my friends.”

Luna smiled brightly.

Seeing her smile, Franz also smiled.

“Should I go right away then?”

“No, promise me one thing before you leave.”

Franz’s expression turned serious as he spoke.

“Stay at the back at all times. I know your strength well. Your magic is meant to protect, not to kill.

So, absolutely, absolutely stay at the back!”

“…Understood.”

Luna agreed, but she intended to assess the situation and go to the battlefield to assist Rudy.

However.

“Red alert!”

“…What? What’s that?”

“An intruder seems to have breached the academy… Luna, you should run…”

While Luna was addressing some faculty matters at the academy, Aryandor attacked.

Hearing this, Luna had a flash of insight.

‘Did Franz predict this…!’

“Where are you going, Luna!”

“Heinz, please run away quickly! I have somewhere I need to be!”

Leaving the faculty member behind, Luna stood up and immediately started walking.

“I heard Yuni was at the academy…”

Luna intended to go help Yuni.

Since Yuni is the Student Council President, she wouldn’t have run away immediately.

‘Should I head to the Student Council Office first?’

While Luna was on her way,

Boom!

A loud noise echoed through the academy.

Luna reacted to the sound.

“That’s…”

It was the main building where the Student Council Office was located.

Luna felt her heart sink.

And she ran.

Worried that Yuni might be there, she arrived at the building.

Upon reaching the floor with the Student Council Office, she heard a voice.

“Go ahead, try it.”

It was Aryandor.

Luna widened her eyes and took out Levian’s Spellbook from her bag.

“Stop right there!!!!!!”

She shouted to stop the opponent.

Aryandor turned his head at Luna’s voice.

Seeing Aryandor covered in blood made her realize others might have already been seriously harmed.

Luna cautiously spoke up.

“Am I too late? Or not?”

Luna said with a lack of confidence.

As various thoughts crossed her mind.

“Huh?”

“Oh! Yuni! Are you okay?”

Yuni appeared.

Seeing Yuni unharmed, Luna sighed in relief.

It seemed Yuni hadn’t fought with Aryandor yet.

‘If I had been a bit later, it could have been disastrous.’

But it’s okay.

I wasn’t too late.

Luna glared sharply at Aryandor.

“Stop bothering them, and fight me instead.”

Luna said this and glanced behind Aryandor.

She saw a person wearing a hood.

The person was wearing a large robe, so their physique wasn’t clear, but from their height and the faint outline of their body, they appeared to be female.

‘Who is that person…?’

But there was no time to figure it out.

“Are you Luna Railer?”

Aryandor rushed towards Luna at a fast pace.

Luna infused mana into the spellbook.

“Barrier.”

Ping—

The barrier clashed with the sword, and Aryandor's sword was blocked by Luna's barrier.

Aryandor furrowed his brows.

"Blocked?"

The magic Luna used was a standard barrier spell.

It usually wasn't the strongest.

Yet, it blocked Aryandor's sword.

Aryandor then looked at the spellbook in Luna's hand.

Levian's Spellbook.

The spellbook he had created at the cost of his life.

"Royal swordsmanship."

Upon seeing the spellbook, Aryandor immediately enveloped his sword with sword energy.

'This was originally a spellbook I had given up on.'

Initially, he planned to use that spellbook, but after finding another method, he had given up on it.

Despite this, the spellbook in front of him wasn't something to be discarded lightly.

"Full Moon,"

'I'll snatch it first.'

Aryandor's sword cut through the surroundings in a circular motion, accompanied by a golden wave.

——!

The barrier and the sword clashed violently.

Waves spread around, causing a strong wind.

After the wind subsided, Aryandor looked at the barrier.

“Interesting, it still blocks?”

Aryandor was amazed that the barrier, uncracked by his attack, held up.

He had planned to pierce the barrier with his swordsmanship, but Luna’s barrier didn’t budge.

The spellbook could engrave magic circles and use them at will.

The barrier Luna created was the result of her research, the most fortified barrier she could make.

That’s why it could withstand Aryandor’s sword.

Although Luna could protect herself this way, staying passive wasn’t the answer.

Aryandor turned his head, looking back.

“Do you think staying still like a turtle will work?”

Behind Aryandor were Yuni and Haruna.

“Uh…”

Luna flipped the pages of the spellbook and infused it with mana again.

“Grow!”

At Luna’s shout, plants grew out of the building.

Giant vines rapidly approached Aryandor.

“Do you think this will work?”

Aryandor, seeing the vines, effortlessly swung his sword.

As Aryandor swung his sword,

Luna quickly ran towards Yuni.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Aryandor wasn’t one to let that slip by.

He swung his sword at Luna, who was running towards him.

The sword aimed precisely at Luna’s heart, speeding towards it to pierce…

“…?”

Surely, he had thrust the sword at Luna, but there was no contact.

Then, that form lightly passed by the sword towards Yuni.

“Illusion magic?”

Aryandor quickly turned his head.

Luna hadn’t moved from her original spot.

It had only appeared like she moved due to the illusion.

By the time Aryandor was delayed by this twice,

Luna was preparing a spell.

“The guilty shall receive their deserved punishment.”

Luna was filling the spellbook with mana.

The movement of mana caused her hair to flutter.

Aryandor found this ridiculous.

‘Not just surviving… she intends to win?’

The professors in front of the academy were only trying to hold out, not thinking of winning.

But here was this girl, not even graduated from the academy, believing she could beat him.

“Divine Punishment!”

Then, a huge lightning bolt fell from the sky.

——!

The lightning bolt that pierced through the building struck Aryandor squarely.

“Kuh! Time Back.”

Aryandor immediately used time magic.

He was unharmed and had moved behind Luna.

“But to think you only plan to win against me…”

Aryandor said this as he attempted to swing his sword at Luna.

However, he couldn’t move his sword.

It was because Luna’s magic had been activated instantly.

“…!”

Aryandor’s eyes widened.

He wasn’t using magic at that moment.

This meant he had been lured here after Luna had already prepared her magic.

Aryandor muttered in a low voice.

“Unbelievable…”

Luna smirked and looked behind her.

In her hand was a square box.

This box was a magical device used in past individual assessment practices.

It was a device designed to focus Astina’s telekinesis magic, specifically gravity magic, to a single point.

“I already know your abilities.”

Luna had anticipated this.

She expected Aryandor to use time magic after being hit by her magic.

And that he would definitely move to the best position to kill her.

That’s why she had set the coordinates of the magical device to behind her and used the magic as soon as Aryandor moved.

Aryandor was pressed down by the force and collapsed on the spot.

“Time… Kuh!”

He tried to use time magic, but his body was pressed down.

It was a pressure he had never felt from Astina or Cromwell.

He knew there was a difference in power between using magic normally and using magic with magic circles, but it was surprising to experience pressure strong enough to prevent the use of magic.

Luna flipped the page of the spellbook again and infused it with mana.

As she was about to use magic again.

“Luna senior! It’s dangerous!”

“Eh?”

The person behind Aryandor.

The person wearing the hood, holding a dagger, charged at Luna.

Yuni noticed and immediately used magic.

“Lightning Chain!”

Strong electricity engulfed the person in the hood.

The person was struck by the electricity and flung away.

“Ah.”

As the person was sent flying by the magic, the hood came off.

Yuni, Luna, and Haruna all recognized the person’s face.

It was Aryandor’s sister, known to be a key figure, so they had all seen her face at least once.

“…Beatrice?”

The person’s face was that of Saint Beatrice.

“Kuh…!”

At that moment, Aryandor moved.

He took advantage of the moment Luna was distracted.

“Quick Blade.”

He moved quickly and escaped from the spot where Luna had set the magic.

Luna widened her eyes at this.

“Finger of the Demon!”

She used the spellbook to cast magic as quickly as possible.

“It’s useless.”

Aryandor said, seeing the black pillars rising towards him.

“Time Back.”

Luna reacted quickly.

If he reverses time…!

She saw Yuni and Haruna behind her.

These two were in danger.

But to cast a barrier…

Crash!

“…?”

A sound came from Aryandor’s direction.

Aryandor, struck by the black pillars Luna had summoned, rolled back and fell.

“Huh???”

He had definitely used time magic.

Yet, he neither moved locations nor healed his body, and simply rolled away, hit by Luna’s attack.

“Did I make a mistake?”

It was unlikely for Aryandor to err, but there was no other reason he couldn’t use time magic unless he made a mistake.

Luna looked on, puzzled.

Tap.

As she watched Aryandor, a warm sensation hovered over Luna's head.

"How can you get distracted during battle? No matter what happens, you must focus on your opponent."

"…Ah."

Luna turned around.

And she saw the face of the person behind her.

"Ugh…"

"Don't worry. You can be distracted now."

What caught Luna's eyes was.

"I'm here now."

The smiling face of Rudy.

# CHAPTER 294
# COMPLETION (15)

“Aryandor, you’ve been here all this time?”

“Did you know all along?”

Aryandor, touching the area where he had been hit, spoke.

I looked at Aryandor in front of me, then turned my gaze to the side.

A person with Beatrice’s face.

I narrowed my eyes.

Looking at that person, I realized what they had done.

Research conducted by the leadership of the rebel forces.

The abilities they used.

Though Serina’s case was a bit different, most were related to the human body.

That’s when I thought.

His goal is Beatrice.

Could it be he aims to revive Beatrice?

Of course, it’s uncertain how the term ‘revive’ will apply here.

Can bringing back just her mind truly be considered revival?

If the body lives but the mind is different, is that resurrection?

If he revives her in such a way, what would his purpose be?

Many thoughts crossed my mind, but the conclusion was the same.

The revival method he wants is to create a body and put Beatrice into it.

I may not know the purpose, but the desired outcome was clear.

And that outcome was right before my eyes.

Human cloning.

The Aryandor I had met and Beatrice in front of me.

This was the only explanation for the two of them.

“Still, it’s not too late.”

I smiled and looked at Luna next to me.

“Good job, Luna.”

“Ehehe.”

Luna scratched her head at my words.

“Now, cover our backs. I’ll take care of him.”

“Okay! I’m counting on you!”

I sent Luna behind me and clenched my fist.

I looked at Aryandor.

He had a completely different vibe from the Aryandor I had met earlier.

It felt distinctly like the Aryandor I originally knew.

Aryandor pushed himself up from the ground.

“Did Haruna tell you the future?”

“No, just my judgment.”

“That’s ridiculous. If that was really me there, you all would have been wiped out. You think coming here made a difference?”

“Maybe? Even if you were there, I doubt it would have been a wipeout. The people there are quite strong.”

The battlefield included not just Astina and Professor Cromwell but many others.

Even if I had briefly stepped away, I doubted there would have been any major change without my presence.

If Aryandor hadn’t been here, I could’ve just used spatial magic to return quickly.

In the end, my senses were correct.

Since he himself said that his counterpart was fake, there was no need to verify.

“But do you think anything will change because you came?”

“A lot has already changed. And your body isn’t in normal condition either.”

Aryandor couldn’t get past Luna.

While Luna had become stronger, his physical condition was odd.

The mana flowing through his body was tangled in a complex, messy way.

This meant that, while his body could move, he wouldn’t be able to properly wield his sword energy.

“Did creating clones tangle up your mana?”

Mana entanglement usually results from a penalty due to mana overload.

Having trained in dark magic myself and experienced its backlash, I was well aware of this.

“Sharp tongue.”

Aryandor pointed his sword at me.

“Yeah, I’ve spoken too much. Sorry. Now, let’s.”

I dashed forward swiftly.

Aryandor filled his sword with mana.

I did the same with my fist.

He had the same idea.

Dominate the opponent from the first move.

“Come forth, Belphegor.”

As I spoke, the figure of a demon appeared behind me.

Different from the demon Professor Robert used, but one capable of similar power.

I took a deep breath and raised my fist.

Aryandor did the same with his sword.

“Royal swordsmanship.”

A golden light shone from Aryandor’s eyes.

“Moonlight.”

We both launched our attacks simultaneously.

A massive sword energy burst from Aryandor, and mana exploded from my fist.

————!

After a bright flash.

Boom!!!

An explosion occurred.

Since it was inside a building, the building crumbled, sending debris flying.

I was unharmed because I countered the attack.

“Ugh!!”

Looking back, I saw Luna had protected Haruna and Yuni with a protective spell, so they were fine.

However, a large dust cloud obscured our view.

“Sigh…”

I took a deep breath.

And focused.

Feeling the flow of mana.

The next attack would come from.

“The right.”

I widened my eyes and stretched my hand to the side.

Aryandor was precisely there.

I dodged Aryandor’s sword aimed at me and grabbed it.

“Found you.”

“Think it’s over just because you found me?”

Aryandor, looking at his captured sword, spoke.

He quickly released the sword.

And kicked towards my stomach.

Thud!

“Ugh!”

A swordsman releasing his sword?

I took an unexpected hit directly to my stomach.

Aryandor clenched his fist and approached me quickly.

I gritted my teeth, ignoring the pain in my stomach.

“Alright, let’s do this.”

I threw Aryandor’s sword to the side and clenched my fist.

I was confident in my punching skills.

I threw my fist straight at Aryandor.

At the same time, Aryandor also threw his fist, hitting my face.

Receive minimal hits, deliver maximum damage.

Aryandor and I exchanged punches, taking hits from each other’s attacks continuously.

I didn’t have time to fill my fist with a large amount of mana.

I just kept launching attacks one after another.

Aryandor, being a magic swordsman, had a sturdy body, but mine was not.

However, by infusing my fists with mana, I could deliver stronger hits than my opponent.

It was essentially a clash between a spear and a shield.

And the outcome was…

“Ugh…”

My victory.

Aryandor staggered and stepped back.

I looked at Aryandor and spat blood-mixed saliva onto the floor.

“Why would a swordsman discard his sword?”

I smirked at Aryandor.

But my situation wasn’t entirely good either.

Even though I had reinforcement magic on me, reducing the impact to a minimum, my face and body still hurt.

Of course, Aryandor was in a worse state.

“Huff… Huff…”

Aryandor, wiping the blood off his face, looked visibly exhausted.

He was clearly in bad shape.

“Why don’t you use time magic?”

I was fully prepared to block it.

Thanks to practicing with Ian, I had learned how to counter time magic to some extent.

The fact that it worked during my fight with Luna proved I had mastered it quite well.

Then, Aryandor’s sword flew at me from the side.

“What…!”

Looking to the side, there was a woman with Beatrice’s face.

She had picked up the sword I had thrown away.

“Huff…”

I sighed and looked at Aryandor.

He couldn’t freely use time magic in his condition.

Aryandor quietly raised his hand.

The gesture was one he made every time he used time magic.

I frowned.

“Time Back.”

“Priscilla.”

—!

I immediately blocked the time magic.

Seeing that his time magic was blocked, Aryandor quickly raised his head.

“Time magic won’t work.”

With my words, Aryandor flashed a cold smile.

“Do you really think so?”

Then his mana surged.

“…?”

Using mana like that…

Aryandor’s mana was tangled.

Forcing tangled mana to move like that would lead to immense pain.

Yet, Aryandor moved his mana.

“Time magic…”

I tried to block his magic, as if it were obvious.

Aryandor’s bitter smile.

Seeing that smile, I felt uneasy.

With such a method of mana manipulation…

I had used that kind of mana manipulation before.

Just a moment ago, when I cut through Venderwood.

I used spatial magic multiple times to tear his body apart.

Then.

“Ugh!”

I immediately prepared my mana.

He planned to use time magic dozens of times.

There’s only one reason for using mana in such a way.

If he can revert his physical state by turning back time, then he wouldn’t receive any penalty.

Since he damaged my body, he plans to turn back time to return to his original state.

“Ha… You’re not yet familiar with that technique. But, I am. It’s a spell I’ve used dozens, hundreds of times.”

Aryandor’s surroundings began to ripple.

“Priscilla!”

“There’s too many!”

Dozens of time magic spells were being activated at once.

If even one of them was executed, time would reverse.

I concentrated and started erasing the magic.

But… there were too many.

I couldn’t erase them all.

Such unfair magic…

Using mana to reverse time.

Using physical energy to reverse time.

And there’s no penalty for it.

How can such magic exist?

Is that why it’s called divine magic?

I thought this as I tried to erase the time magic.

But then, a thought occurred to me.

The term “divine magic” is a name given by humans.

As Haruna said, it was a nickname created when religion, politics, and magic all combined their powers.

Then…

This is ordinary magic.

Magic that involves an equivalent exchange between mana and magic.

Then, there must be something he loses.

What exchange allows him to reverse time?

I pondered this, thinking that if time reverses, I would lose.

The contemplation was brief.

Then, Beatrice's face caught my eye.

Human cloning.

The human body.

The body's state is reversed.

It definitely returns to a past state.

That's when I questioned.

Why could he continue to remember?

If his body returned to the past, shouldn't the memories of this fight disappear too?

With this doubt, I looked at Aryandor.

The gesture Aryandor was making with his hand.

It looked like he was flicking his fingers to use it.

But, I thought the opposite.

Could that be a distraction?

I shifted my gaze from Aryandor's hand.

To Aryandor's other hand.

I looked at his hand.

It was in his pocket.

I took a breath.

That's it.

"Time…"

"Transfer."

I gave up on erasing the time magic and used spatial magic instead.

It wasn't moving my body.

But something on the opponent's body.

Moving that object.

"…!"

Then Aryandor's eyes widened.

"What's this?"

Then, a pocket watch landed in my hand.

This was the item that had been in Aryandor's pocket.

I had transferred the object into my hand.

I looked at Aryandor.

He had attempted to use time magic, but now all his magic was stopped.

I smirked.

"Ah, sorry. I have a habit of looking for the trick first whenever I see magic."

I grabbed the chain of the pocket watch and swung it side to side.

This was it.

“So, is this how it works? Time magic.”

This was the trick behind the time magic.

# CHAPTER 295
# COMPLETION (16)

I glanced at the pocket watch in my hand, causing Haruna to widen her eyes.

“The Spirit of Ophillius…”

I quickly looked behind me.

“Haruna, do you know about this?”

“There’s no exact name for it, but it’s called the Spirit of Ophillius.”

“The Spirit of Ophillius?”

“It’s a device used by time magic users to record the past. I don’t know the details of its use, but your guess was probably right, Rudy.”

The past…

It felt like the pieces of the puzzle were falling into place.

A device to record the past.

It was used to cover the flaws of time magic.

Like spatial magic, time magic wasn’t divine magic.

It was magic used by sacrificing memories.

Only hidden by magical tools, it was no different from ordinary magic.

Aryandor was grinding his teeth, glaring at me.

I smirked in response.

“Try using time magic.”

He wouldn’t be able to use time magic.

Even if he could turn back time, he would forget that I learned the trick of time magic.

Fighting me in that state, knowing everything already, would surely lead to my victory.

I laughed.

I had completely sealed off time magic.

He was tangled in mana and couldn’t unleash his full power.

“How about you give up now?”

I suggested surrender to him.

Even now, people are dying on the battlefield.

If he surrenders, we can quickly clean up the battlefield and reduce casualties.

“You wouldn’t want the rebels to be annihilated, would you?”

“Annihilated…?”

At my words, Aryandor bowed his head.

“If you surrender willingly, I’ll spare the lives of the rebels.”

“…”

Of course, I had no intention of sparing Aryandor.

With so many rebel soldiers, it wasn’t possible to punish them all, but I planned to make an example of the leadership.

“What do you say?”

Aryandor quietly raised his head in response.

“Ha ha…”

Aryandor smirked and laughed like a madman.

“Laughing?”

“Such nonsense. As if I would accept such a proposal.”

I looked at him incredulously.

“Even if it means saving your comrades… Such a proposal?”

“Comrades? Who are the comrades?”

“What?”

“They are tools. Tools for achieving my goals. Have you ever seen someone sacrifice for tools?”

Tools?

The people who were with him were just tools?

Veins throbbed on my forehead.

“You’re even more of a piece of sh*t than I thought.”

“They probably think of me as a tool too. The rebels and I were just companions with the same goal for a while. And.”

Aryandor’s eyes were filled with madness.

“I don’t think I’ve lost this fight.”

He stretched his hand to the side.

Beatrice was beside him.

“Ugh…”

As Aryandor reached out, light emanated from Beatrice.

This made Haruna’s eyes widen.

“We must block it!”

I felt it too.

I didn’t know the exact reason for cloning Beatrice, but there was definitely a reason he had brought her clone.

I had no intention of letting his plan succeed.

As I dashed forward quickly, Aryandor retracted his hand and blocked my path.

“Kuh!”

Aryandor’s sword clashed with my fist.

He grimaced and was pushed back slightly.

I yelled out.

“Luna!”

“Got it!”

Luna understood my intention and quickly opened her magic book, pouring mana into it.

“Point Explosion!”

A small flame ignited in front of Beatrice, about to explode.

Aryandor, seeing this, turned around.

He wrapped his sword in sword energy and sliced through the rising flame.

I immediately charged at Aryandor.

“Opportunity.”

Aryandor, having turned around, had no chance to block my attack.

I infused my hand with mana and struck Aryandor down.

Boom!

Aryandor was slammed into the ground.

“Cough!”

He spat out blood.

I glanced at him briefly before turning away.

At the end of my gaze was Beatrice.

The air around us changed.

Even the aura emanating from Beatrice had changed.

“What have you done…”

Before I could finish my question,

Beatrice manipulated mana.

And the words that came out of her mouth made my eyes widen.

“Time Back.”

The words from Beatrice’s mouth were the incantation for time magic.

Beatrice disappeared.

She reappeared behind Luna.

The sudden use of time magic left no room for defense.

“Ugh!”

Beatrice attempted to stab Luna with a dagger.

“Luna!”

“Ah!”

Yuni quickly moved and pushed Luna away.

Thanks to her, they avoided Beatrice’s dagger.

“Using time magic?”

Aryandor had imparted time magic in that brief moment.

That was the only explanation for this situation.

I couldn’t understand him.

He cloned Beatrice, whom I thought was his goal, and used her like this.

I was sure his objective was the resurrection of Beatrice.

I thought he caused all this to resurrect a family member he cherished, but the current situation didn’t seem like it.

Someone who cherished people wouldn’t have called the rebels tools.

“Rudy!”

That’s when Haruna called out.

“Understood!”

Luna and the others couldn’t possibly face Beatrice, who was using time magic.

“Time Back.”

Beatrice attempted to use time magic again.

“Priscilla!”

I used Priscilla to block her magic.

Beatrice, seeing her magic blocked, looked at me and raised her dagger, which was swirling with sword energy.

Using both time magic and sword energy in her body, she was essentially Beatrice yet not Beatrice.

“Royal Swordsmanship.”

Beatrice charged at me with her dagger.

“Full Moon.”

I attempted to counter her attack.

Then, I saw Aryandor passing by me.

He had gotten up from where he had been the moment I diverted my gaze.

His sword was aimed at Haruna.

“Damn!”

I couldn’t catch Aryandor, who had passed by in an instant, because Beatrice was blocking me.

“Ugh!”

Haruna twisted her body trying to dodge Aryandor’s attack, but she couldn’t completely avoid it.

Her shoulder was slashed by his sword, and blood spurted out.

The blood that burst forth shone brightly, despite being red, ordinary blood.

Aryandor, seeing the light, opened his mouth.

"…Is this the place?"

Seeing this, I immediately ran out.

"Cough!"

I quickly approached Aryandor and grabbed his neck, applying pressure.

"Choke… Cough…"

Aryandor struggled as if in pain, his face turning increasingly red, yet he was still laughing.

"Ugh… Cough!!"

Aryandor flailed in that state and then used his leg in a counter-move to target my other hand.

Snap!

"Ah…?"

In that hand, I was holding Aryandor's pocket watch.

Aryandor's kick hit the pocket watch precisely, and my eyes widened.

Throb!

Suddenly, a great shock hit my head.

Information was flowing in.

Numerous pieces of information struck my mind, causing a headache from the overload.

Feeling dizzy with so much information coming in, I let go of Aryandor, and he fell from my grasp.

“Cough…”

Aryandor gasped for air after being released from my grip and looked behind.

“Here! This is the place!”

Aryandor shouted to Beatrice.

“Rudy…!”

Haruna, bleeding from her shoulder, also shouted at me.

His mention of “place” meant he had found the entrance to the holy site.

I focused, trying to ignore the dizziness and pain, and looked at Aryandor.

And I filled my hand with mana.

Despite the influx of information and accompanying pain, I ignored everything and focused solely on Aryandor.

Beatrice ran towards Aryandor.

At the same time, I also stepped towards Aryandor.

“I won’t let you escape.”

I threw my punch forward.

Mana burst out.

———!

“Kuugh…”

My mana pierced through Aryandor’s stomach.

As the mana tore through his abdomen, blood gushed from his mouth.

Seeing this, I staggered.

I must kill him for sure…

I can't leave any chance for retaliation…

With that thought, I tried to attack Aryandor once more.

But, I couldn't extend my fist.

My mind was flooded with jumbled information.

Even when I tried to use mana, my body wouldn't move.

I looked at Aryandor until the end.

Aryandor's body slumped.

I saw him falling to the ground, bleeding out.

Watching him, I lost consciousness and fell.

---

"…?"

I opened my eyes.

I looked around.

This place wasn't the academy.

I couldn't see Luna, Yuni, or Haruna, who were with me.

I lifted my head.

It was raining from the sky.

And then, I saw a boy and a girl ahead.

"You're my sister, right?"

The boy with black hair said to the girl in front of him.

And the girl, looking at the boy, opened her mouth with sad eyes.

“Aryandor…”

I widened my eyes.

Aryandor?

Looking closely at the girl.

“…Beatrice?”

It was the appearance of Saint Beatrice.

# CHAPTER 296
# COMPLETION (17)

I blankly stared ahead.

Aryandor and Beatrice looked younger than the faces I knew.

Where am I?

I pondered deeply.

Just moments ago, I was fighting Aryandor.

But why am I here all of a sudden?

Then, a thought crossed my mind.

The pocket watch Aryandor had touched.

Surely, when it was hit, all sorts of information flooded into my head.

Is that why I'm seeing this scene now?

"How have you been… up until now?"

"I've been good. I've made a lot of friends… and saved many people…"

Then, Aryandor and Beatrice in front of me started talking.

They continued their conversation as if they couldn't see me standing right in front of them.

"It was hell for me. Being pushed around in the streets, striving hard working my body… And in doing so, I kept searching… I strived to continue my search.

I…"

Beatrice hugged Aryandor.

“I’m sorry… I should have come sooner. I’m sorry.”

After holding him for a moment, Beatrice let go.

Then, she reached out her hand to Aryandor.

“It’s okay now that I’m here. It’s all right now.”

With a sad smile, Beatrice spoke.

“Let’s go together. To a quiet place in the countryside… Let’s live comfortably, just the two of us. You can meet someone you love, get married, and live comfortably… quietly… Let’s live like that.”

I tilted my head in confusion at that.

Beatrice made such an offer?

Was I witnessing something strange?

If such an event had happened, wouldn’t the current situation be different?

I silently observed.

Aryandor quietly looked at the hand Beatrice offered him.

Then, he raised his head and looked into Beatrice’s eyes.

“Sister… I now know the future.”

“Yes, I know all about you learning time magic… and knowing the future…”

“So.”

Aryandor interrupted Beatrice.

“I know what will happen later.”

Aryandor clenched his fist.

“No matter what I do, no matter what happens, within a year, you will die.”

“Aryandor.”

“I’ve seen thousands, tens of thousands of futures. But in none of those futures did you survive. People demanded your sacrifice, and you accepted it. And those things were all trivial. You died for really minor things. I cannot accept that future.”

Beatrice then closed her mouth tightly before finally speaking.

“Aryandor, everyone dies eventually.”

“But, that doesn’t have to be at a young age, before one’s natural lifespan is up. Especially not for strangers one has never met before.”

“No, if that life can help someone. If it can save someone. Then isn’t it right to use it for that? Especially if it’s a life that’s going to end anyway.”

“And then,”

Beatrice placed her hand on Aryandor’s shoulder.

“Have you ever seen a future where I come to find you?”

“……”

“Even if you look at tens of thousands of futures, you can’t know everything. That’s the nature of the future. You might see a future where you die tomorrow, but you can’t know if you’ll really die tomorrow, the day after, or not at all.”

Beatrice locked eyes with Aryandor.

“You shouldn’t let such futures determine your life. The future is just a reference.”

“No, I disagree.”

Aryandor spoke firmly.

“I plan to change the future entirely. And your words just now have confirmed my belief.”

“What?”

Aryandor smiled.

A bitter madness swirled in his laughter.

“We’ll start over. A world where you don’t become a Saint. A world where you don’t have to sacrifice. That’s the world we’ll create.”

“What are you talking about?”

This time, Aryandor reached out his hand to Beatrice.

“We’re starting over. With dimension magic, it’s possible. Creating a different world. Restarting this world is possible.”

Beatrice’s eyes widened.

“I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“We’ll turn back the time of this world. To before we parted. To that time in Ephomos. And then, you won’t become a Saint, and I won’t learn time magic from Ophillius. If we go back to that time…”

Beatrice opened her mouth.

“Then what about now?”

“If we turn back time, now will cease to exist.”

“So you’re saying to erase the present itself?”

“Yes. We don’t need a twisted world like this. A timeline where your death is certain and I’m broken.”

“Aryandor…”

“Sister. Take my hand.”

Aryandor smiled again, extending his hand once more.

“With a bit more research, it’s possible. Maybe even now. Especially if you help, we can speed up the process.”

Thwack!

Beatrice slapped Aryandor’s hand away without hesitation.

“……?”

Aryandor looked at Beatrice, puzzled.

“Sister?”

“You’re seriously mistaken about something.”

“What do you mean? This is the way for all of us to be happy. A way to overcome this fate, this future…”

“That’s not overcoming; it’s avoidance.”

Beatrice looked at Aryandor with a sad expression.

“Aryandor, it’s not too late. Even now. If you go down that path, many people will die. Everyone around you.”

“I know. But if we turn back time, all those people will come back. Everything will be reset to its original state. No, they might even live better lives. I know everything and can change those people’s lives…”

“Then, can you truly say those people are themselves?”

The two were already walking different paths.

Beatrice opened her mouth with a pleading voice.

“Aryandor… this is the end… take my hand.”

Aryandor looked at Beatrice and then turned away.

“If that’s what you wish, Sister. I will leave.”

His voice was cold.

He didn’t look back.

“Aryandor…”

Aryandor went his own way, and Beatrice was left sitting on the ground, crying.

I quietly spoke up after watching them.

“So Beatrice is…”

Suddenly, everything in front of me became blurry.

“…So it ended up that way.”

“Is that so…”

The surroundings changed.

It looked like a small study.

In front of me were Beatrice and an old man.

“…Levian?”

It was Levian, the man who had handed over the spellbook to Luna.

“We’ve reached the worst-case scenario.”

Then, a phrase came to mind.

Levian’s diary I saw in the Railer domain.

Levian had mentioned meeting Beatrice there.

The details weren't specified, though.

Levian looked at Beatrice and spoke.

"So, are we proceeding as planned?"

"Yes, we must. I've made up my mind after all."

A decision?

"It might be very painful. It's something no one has ever done before."

"I'm aware. But can I just summon someone… to suddenly fall into another dimension. I just feel sorry. It feels like I'm passing my responsibility onto them…"

I widened my eyes.

Summoning someone from another dimension.

They were talking about me.

"What will you do, Levian?"

"I have my preparations to make. I have my own sins to atone for."

Levian held a book in his hand.

The book was the spellbook used by Luna.

"Then I shall take my leave now."

"Thank you."

"What are you thanking me for? I'm the one who should be thankful."

Levian smiled with his eyes.

The warm wrinkles around his eyes made him look very kind.

After seeing that, my consciousness began to blur.

---

“Uh…”

My head was throbbing.

I grabbed my head and got up.

“Rudy!”

“Rudy! Are you okay?”

“Senior!”

Various voices were heard.

I opened my eyes and saw Yuni, Haruna, and Luna in front of me.

I quickly grasped the situation and asked.

“…How long have I been out?”

Haruna answered.

“It hasn’t even been 5 minutes.”

“Aryandor?”

“Beatrice supported him and took him inside the sanctuary.”

The last scene I remembered was Aryandor being stabbed in the abdomen.

If Beatrice had supported him and taken him away, he was seriously injured.

I regained my composure and looked at the pocket watch in my hand.

The pocket watch appeared to be cracked from Aryandor’s forceful strike.

However, the information it recorded was already in my head.

Countless pieces of information floated around in my mind.

From Aryandor's objectives, the futures he saw, to other details.

"I need to go… to the sanctuary."

I got up from my spot and steadied myself.

Then, I looked beside me.

Haruna was there.

"Haruna."

"…Yes."

"What are the chances of me winning in the futures you've seen?"

Haruna's expression hardened at my sudden question.

I asked Haruna again.

"How likely is it?"

After pondering for a moment, Haruna smiled.

Then she confidently said.

"100 percent."

It was a lie.

It couldn't possibly be 100 percent.

I was curious about what she would say, but her answer was so absurd that it made me laugh.

In truth, the future didn't matter much to me.

Whatever the future holds, I can overcome it.

I've always done so.

"If it's 100 percent, then there's no problem."

I loosened up a bit and reached out my hand to Luna.

"Luna, can you help me?"

"Huh?"

Luna looked at me, puzzled.

"I think I'll need your help."

Hearing my words, Luna smiled and nodded.

"Yeah! Okay."

"Senior… Are you sure you're okay?"

Yuni, who was beside me, asked with a worried look.

I nodded.

"Just a bit dizzy, but not enough to stop me from fighting."

Although I had used up mana, my physical condition wasn't too bad.

"Yuni, please inform the others about the situation. Luna and I will head into the sanctuary."

"…Okay, I understand."

I reached out and patted Yuni's head.

I stroked her hair a few times and smiled.

"Take care."

"Okay…"

Then, I turned around.

“Luna, shall we go?”

“…Yeah.”

Hearing Luna’s response, I activated my mana.

# CHAPTER 297
# COMPLETION (18)

I took Luna's hand and moved mana.

The surroundings flickered, and the space shifted.

Luna, observing the changing space, asked me,

"How can I help?"

"Spellbook. We need to use the spellbook."

"Spellbook?"

Luna looked at the spellbook in her hand.

"That's the key to our current situation."

This spellbook perfectly adhered to the laws of magic.

The First Law of Magic: Equivalent Exchange.

The fact that this book could activate a magic circle by simply inputting mana advanced that law further.

A book that makes anything possible with mana alone.

That was Levian's spellbook.

"I'm going to use this book to eliminate time magic."

"…Time magic?"

Before answering Luna's question, we arrived at the sacred place.

A giant temple.

Dozens of jars were placed around it.

“…Have we arrived?”

And in front of it, Aryandor was sitting, bleeding from a stomach wound.

I looked down at Aryandor, who was in no condition to fight.

Yet, he used his sword like a cane to stand up as we approached.

“Rudy Astria. You understand the situation now, don’t you?”

Aryandor looked at me with a smile.

“Yes. Now the whole picture is starting to come together.”

“Ha… Then you know what the situation is.”

I glanced sideways.

Beatrice was there, absorbing the energy around her.

His plan.

It was to bestow dimensional magic upon Beatrice.

A being with both time and dimensional magic.

Add my spatial magic to that.

Then Beatrice, or rather, this vessel, would become a perfect being capable of interfering with dimensions.

Dimensional magic, spatial magic, time magic.

All three have flaws.

Spatial magic can’t move to dimensions where one didn’t exist.

Time magic can't see or interfere with dimensions where one didn't exist.

Dimensional magic can see all dimensions but can't interfere directly.

Interference requires a corresponding price.

However, all these downsides disappear when the abilities are combined.

If one possesses all these abilities.

If one can use spatial, time, and dimensional magic altogether.

All downsides vanish, and everything becomes possible.

Even changing the world world itself.

"It's over, the vessel is already accepting the power."

The vessel.

Beatrice is the vessel.

She has intelligence but lacks a mind of her own.

This was done to make it easier for her to accept abilities.

Necromancy.

Magic that resurrects the dead.

More precisely, it's not about bringing them back to life but using the corpses to harness their power.

The body of Beatrice is engraved with magic, serving as the source of necromancy.

She was meant to absorb the power of dead bodies here to learn dimensional magic.

I laughed at Aryandor's overconfidence.

"What over? This is just the beginning."

“The moment it started, it ended. You’ve seen the pocket watch’s information, haven’t you?”

The information from the pocket watch.

I definitely obtained it.

I saw the current future there.

In tens of thousands of futures drawn, Aryandor was winning in all of them.

“So what?”

Regardless of who’s here or what situation unfolds, even if Aryandor wins, that’s their problem.

I don’t need to care about the affairs of other dimensions.

The ‘me’ in this world is a completely different person from the ‘me’ in other dimensions.

The way I’ve lived and everything I’ve experienced are all different.

That means the outcome will also be different.

I dashed forward quickly.

“Agh!”

Aryandor tried to block my attack, but in his severely wounded state, he couldn’t.

He was sent flying far away by my punch.

Then Beatrice moved.

“Royal swordsmanship.”

Beatrice attempted to use swordsmanship with a dagger, and at the same time, she used time magic.

“Full Moon.”

Scattering golden sword energy.

At the same time, time magic activated.

The era of scattering the sword energy repeats.

It was as if the sword had been swung dozens of times, sending tens of sword energies flying at me.

“Spatial Severance.”

Seeing this, I activated spatial magic.

Splitting space to erase the sword energies.

And the attacks I couldn’t erase, I dodged by twisting my body.

“Fire Sphere!”

While I was dodging attacks, Luna behind me used magic.

A small flame appeared from Luna’s hand, flying towards Beatrice and causing a large explosion.

Boom!

The explosion engulfed Beatrice.

Not only that, but it also reached the jars behind her.

The jars containing the relics of the Saints shattered under the explosion’s influence.

“Gasp…”

Luna’s eyes widened at the sight.

“Sorry…! What do we do now?”

I shook my head.

“No, it’s fine. We had to destroy them anyway.”

“…What?”

I filled my fist with mana.

And then I punched.

Boom!!!

Dozens of jars behind shattered.

The relics contained within fell to the ground and dispersed in white light.

Aryandor’s eyes widened.

“…What are you trying to do?”

“Why? Is there a problem? Ah~ You haven’t seen this future, have you?”

I smiled.

This was our way to victory.

I had many questions when Haruna first introduced me to this place.

Why not destroy it?

This place makes dimensional magic possible.

But do we need to protect it?

Initially, I thought maybe it could be useful to stop Aryandor.

However, after learning about Aryandor’s goal and that vessel, Beatrice, through the pocket watch, I realized we couldn’t stop them.

I looked ahead.

Beatrice, who had been caught in Luna's explosion, walked towards us, unharmed.

Not a single injury remained.

The ability to heal all wounds belonged to Venderwood.

'There's no ordinary way to stop someone like that.'

Beatrice can't be stopped by ordinary means.

She uses time magic, her body heals instantly, and she can't feel pain.

Even if we did our best to stop her, it was really easy for her to reach her goal, the sanctuary, and absorb power.

Just by arriving here and getting attacked, she could absorb power.

Then, a bigger question arises.

Why didn't Haruna destroy this place?

If Beatrice could inevitably reach this place, wouldn't it have been right to destroy the sanctuary?

They say we wouldn't be able to see the future if this place were gone, but isn't that better than Aryandor achieving his goal and turning back the world's time?

Then, a thought occurred to me.

What would they have done if we had destroyed this place from the start?

There's only one possibility.

They would have targeted Haruna.

If they had focused on Haruna, could we have protected her?

Ultimately, would she have died by their hands, and obtained power from Haruna's corpse.

But by leaving the sanctuary, Haruna gave them a choice.

To fight past me and others and target Haruna herself, or to enter this sanctuary.

They would naturally choose the latter.

If they fought to kill Haruna, they couldn't be sure of their victory.

There's no guarantee they would win against us, nor that they could obtain Haruna's corpse intact.

Then, an unavoidable thought comes to mind.

Did Haruna lure them here?

What Haruna said before coming here was a lie, but it wasn't.

A 100 percent chance of winning.

If Haruna knew the correct future, she wouldn't have said such a thing.

But saying this gave me one hint.

Head towards an unknown future.

To a future unseen.

To a future unfound.

"Stop him…!"

Aryandor pointed at me and shouted.

Beatrice rushed towards me as I was smashing the jars.

"Aryandor, now you understand why you couldn't see the future where we win, right?"

This sanctuary connects different dimensions, the future, and the past.

The Saints' relics contain dimensional magic, linking the future and the past with the present.

It allows people from the past to see the present and those in the present to see the future.

It acts as a medium allowing users of dimensional and time magic to see into the past and future.

So, what if all these relics are destroyed?

If this sanctuary disappears?

"It's a future you haven't seen."

A future unseen.

If all these relics are destroyed, our timeline becomes a future no one can see.

Boom!

I destroyed the jars.

Beatrice tried her best to protect them, but she couldn't stop it.

Nor could she reverse it with time magic.

Time magic can't interfere with other dimensions.

These Saints' relics distinctly influence other dimensions.

They allow other dimensions to see our world's future.

So, they couldn't be reversed with time magic.

"Luna."

I called Luna and summoned Priscilla at the same time.

"Uh…?"

“Priscilla, make a contract with Luna.”

“…What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

Luna asked me with wide eyes.

“I said earlier, I’m going to eliminate time magic.”

“But, how?”

“If you make a contract with Priscilla, you’ll be able to feel the connection between you and me.”

“Is that even possible?”

“We’ll know once we try. And if you feel the connection, use my spatial magic as a sacrifice to eliminate that guy’s time magic. I’ll be holding the front in the meantime.”

“Spatial magic?”

Aryandor, having heard me, widened his eyes.

“You…”

“What do you think of my plan? Not bad, right?”

I smiled at Aryandor and then turned around.

“Can you do it?”

“I’ll try!”

“Good.”

I nodded.

Now, we must stop her.

Prevent Beatrice from escaping.

We had to block her from leaving this space.

She needed to disappear along with this space.

I moved immediately.

# CHAPTER 298
# COMPLETION (19)

Beatrice swung her sword towards us, aiming at Luna who was holding a spellbook.

“Your opponent is me.”

I burst my mana to block Beatrice’s sword.

Aryandor said nothing, just watched the situation.

“Full Moon.”

Beatrice used her sword technique, releasing a burst of golden sword energy, and simultaneously used time magic.

Sword energies came at Luna from multiple directions.

“Behemoth.”

A giant elephant, Behemoth, emerged from the ground, taking the brunt of Beatrice’s sword energy with its massive body.

“Puuuh…!”

Behemoth staggered under the impact of Beatrice’s sword energy but wasn’t seriously injured and quickly regained its footing.

Beatrice continued her assault.

“Northern Swordsmanship.”

Watching this, I manipulated my mana.

“Lich.”

At my command, a skeletal reaper appeared behind Beatrice.

Clank—

Its chains wrapped around Beatrice, entangling her before she could use her sword technique.

“Luna, how much longer?”

“10 minutes… no, 15 minutes should do!”

I nodded at her response and looked forward.

Beatrice struggled to escape the Lich’s grasp.

Then, I clenched my fist and directed it towards Beatrice’s back.

“Huff!”

Mana exploded.

Kwaang!

Jars behind us shattered.

The number of jars decreased.

—!

As the jars shattered, the space echoed, and cracks began to form in the ceiling.

The more jars broke, the more the space itself started to collapse.

Aryandor looked from the cracking ceiling to me.

“Rudy Astria. What the hell are you doing?”

I replied,

“What does it look like? I’m making sure you’re completely eradicated.”

“Even if it means your death?”

“…Huh?”

Luna reacted to Aryandor’s words, her eyes widening as she looked at him.

“What are you talking about?”

Aryandor, looking at Luna behind him, continued,

“When Beatrice’s time magic and Rudy Astria’s spatial magic disappear, and all these jars are gone, this dimension will collapse. Yes, then we will obviously die. But what about you? How do you plan to escape?”

The key to moving through this sacred place is space, time, and dimensional magic.

With that magic, one can come and go from this place.

“Are you saying you’re willing to die with us? Is that it, Rudy Astria?”

Aryandor chuckled.

He wasn’t wrong.

If space and time magic were to disappear together, I would have no way to leave this place with my own power.

Of course, with Haruna outside, she could get me out of here if she entered, but that would defeat the purpose.

The whole reason for luring them to this place was to separate Haruna and the others.

If Haruna entered, they wouldn’t just let her go because they could prevent us from leaving if they wanted to.

This was also why they couldn’t leave right now; if they tried to stop me from leaving, they’d be stuck here too.

But I had no intention of dying here.

I turned to look at Luna, who was looking back at me with an anxious expression.

“Luna, it’s okay. I won’t die.”

“Rudy…”

“Have you ever seen me lie?”

“No…”

I smiled and patted Luna on the back.

“Trust me.”

Seeing my smile, Luna pressed her lips together and nodded.

“If you’re lying, you’re really going to get it from me…”

“Of course. Oh, let me know when the magic is about to end. I have something to do.”

Hearing my answer, Luna nodded and focused again.

I could feel the spatial magic inside me slowly fading away.

Beatrice must have felt it too, as she furrowed her brow.

Tied up by the Lich, Beatrice used her time magic.

Her body moved, escaping the chains.

I wanted to block her using Priscilla, but I couldn’t.

The spatial magic was almost gone, and Priscilla was focused on connecting with Luna.

But there was no need to worry.

Beatrice broke free from the chains and ran towards Aryandor.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

I gathered mana in my fist and charged.

Beatrice grabbed Aryandor and moved her mana.

The surroundings flickered.

It looked like they were trying to leave.

“Belphegor.”

At the same time, I summoned a demon.

Behind me, the form of a demon appeared, and I raised my fist.

“Huff!”

Belphegor’s power is to amplify mana.

I filled my fist with far stronger mana than usual and thrust it forward.

————!

Mana exploded, hitting both Beatrice and Aryandor.

“……!”

Aryandor was in no shape to withstand the attack, and Beatrice took it all by herself.

Their plan to escape was immediately thwarted, and Luna’s magic was nearing its end.

I looked towards Aryandor, swept up in the explosion, then turned back.

“Rudy! It’s almost done…!”

At Luna’s shout, I smiled and reached out my hand.

“Yeah, thanks.”

“…Huh?”

I reached for Luna, taking the spellbook in her hand.

“Ru… dy?”

“I’ll be there soon. Go ahead.”

Luna’s surroundings shimmered, and she opened her eyes wide.

“What is that…”

Then, Beatrice burst out of the explosion.

I opened my mouth.

“Lich.”

A skeleton that appeared in front of us blocked Beatrice’s path.

“Rudy! Rudy! You idiot!!!”

Luna shouted, but her body disappeared right after.

I had sent her outside before the spatial magic disappeared.

As soon as Luna was out, I felt the spatial magic vanish.

“Ha… So, you really plan to end it like this?”

Aryandor pushed himself up from the floor.

Blood was flowing from his abdomen, and his legs trembled as if standing was a struggle, yet he was smiling.

“Yeah, die with me. If only you weren’t here, if only you hadn’t come. You have to take responsibility for the mess you made, by dying with me…”

I narrowed my eyes at Aryandor.

“What nonsense have you been spouting?”

“What?”

“Do I look crazy to you? Dying with someone like you?”

I’ve said it from the start.

I have no intention of dying.

Why does everyone make such a fuss…

I laughed.

“You’re just a coward who gets scared and runs away before anything even happens. Do you think I’d die with a coward?”

I’ve seen what you’re going through, but I don’t pity you.

The only ones I pity are the people who stood by you.

Those who are being sacrificed even at this moment.

Those who fought for such a worthless cause.

I pity them all.

But not you.

You’re just pathetic.

Aryandor looked at me as if I was absurd.

“So, how do you plan to get out of here?”

As he spoke, Beatrice turned around.

The few jars that were left.

Beatrice raised her sword towards those jars.

Bang!!!!

She shattered the jars, and the space began to warp.

I looked at Aryandor in front of me and frowned.

“Yeah, make that face. Were you waiting for Ian Astria or Haruna to save you? Thinking one of them would come to your rescue?”

Aryandor scoffed at me.

I looked down on him with pity.

“That look… that damn look… don’t look at me with those eyes!!! Why does everyone look at me with those eyes…”

Ignoring Aryandor, I opened the spellbook Luna left behind.

Flipping through the pages, I spoke.

“Aryandor, do you know? Spatial magic, time magic, dimensional magic, all of it was made by humans. It wasn’t anything divine.”

“What?”

“Magic created by humans and the future shown by humans. You gave up on that. The future isn’t something crafted by a God. That’s why I think you’re pathetic. Even if it was made by a God, you shouldn’t have given up. Especially if they were truly precious to you.”

I opened a page in the spellbook and infused it with mana.

“No, time magic… the future… it’s something humans can change…”

“You still don’t get it.”

I looked behind Aryandor.

Beatrice had shattered the last jar.

The dimension trembled.

Boom—

Cracks formed in the ceiling, and the entire space wavered.

I focused on Luna's spellbook, noticing the massive mana leaking out.

Then, a strong gravitational force emerged around me.

It was a concentrated gravitational force, gravity magic.

But it was a bit different.

Its power was much stronger.

I channeled my mana into the spellbook.

"Then, let me show you."

The strong gravitational force occurred around my body.

"…Huff."

I endured it with my body.

"What are you doing?"

I saw it.

Ordinary magic could affect space.

Astina's gravity magic.

Strong gravity can twist space.

Astina showed me this during our duel.

She couldn't handle it as spatial magic, but I'm different.

I have experience using spatial magic.

If there's a tremor in space, I can feel it precisely with my body.

I focused all my senses.

On the twist in space caused by gravity.

Focused on it.

"Ah…"

Aryandor just stared blankly.

"To leave this place, you just need to handle one of the three: space, time, or dimensional magic, right?"

I reached out my hand into the twisting space.

My surroundings wavered.

"That kind of thing… That can't possibly work… Such nonsense…"

"Didn't I tell you? It's all magic made by humans."

Being able to handle space or time magic isn't because of some divine selection.

Because it wasn't magic created by a God.

And everything made by humans has its flaws.

If I could create a similar twist to the one used to enter this place, couldn't I also leave?

I increased the gravity with my mana, creating a twist similar to the one when we entered.

"Ah…"

My surroundings wavered.

I looked forward.

At the crumbling dimension and Aryandor, who was in despair.

He didn't try to stop my magic, nor did he think of escaping the crumbling dimension; he just stared blankly at me.

# CHAPTER 299
# COMPLETION (20)

I saw a familiar scene.

The desk I had used for a long time and the documents around it.

Of course, it wasn't exactly the same because everything was broken and in a mess.

A loud noise came from behind me.

"Hurry and do something! Rudy… Rudy!!"

"…Isn't that him?"

"…What?"

I turned around and locked eyes with Luna.

I saw Luna, her face a mess with tears.

Luna was holding onto Haruna's clothes next to her, crying.

"Hey, Luna. You're here."

"Eh…???"

Luna looked at me with a baffled expression.

"Didn't I tell you? I knew he'd manage on his own."

Haruna said, patting Luna's shoulder.

"Rudy?"

"What, you didn't believe me?"

I smiled at Luna.

“No, it’s not that… It’s just the atmosphere… sniff… I thought Rudy was going to sacrifice himself…”

sniff

“If I had to, I would.”

I said, trying to approach Luna.

“Ah…”

“Rudy!”

But I couldn’t move forward and collapsed on the spot.

My body had given out.

I had used too much mana, and the strong gravity I had faced head-on made my body feel damaged.

Luna quickly ran to me.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m okay but…”

I wasn’t about to lose consciousness, but I couldn’t muster any strength in my legs.

“We need to… heal you…”

Luna grabbed the spellbook in my hand and hurriedly moved.

“Uh…”

But the spellbook didn’t respond.

I stared at the book and muttered to myself.

“Did it overload…”

I didn’t expect the book to stop working after I had put so much mana into distorting space with gravity.

It was a close call.

I could have been trapped there…

Of course, I was confident it would work.

It was an item made by Levian.

I didn’t know it would be this risky.

But the outcome was good, so…

“Let’s go get treated first…”

Luna supported me.

I glanced at Luna for a moment.

There was something I thought of before getting treated.

I cautiously looked at Luna and then spoke up.

“Treatment is fine but… there’s a place I need to visit first.”

“A place to visit?”

“The battlefield… I’m thinking of going there… Could you take me?”

“…What?”

Luna’s teary expression hardened.

She looked at me angrily as if she were mad.

“Idiot! You’re in no condition right now!”

“No, but the war has to stop. It’s not like I’m going to fight.”

If we don’t hurry, meaningless sacrifices will only increase.

So, if I just go and announce that Aryandor is dead…

“You idiot! Fool! Going to the battlefield in this condition…!”

As Luna was shouting, a voice came from the corridor.

“Rudy Astria! Are you there?”

Luna and I turned our heads with puzzled looks.

Since the wall was already broken, we could clearly see the corridor just by turning our heads.

“…Brother?”

In the corridor, where the voice came from, was Ian Astria.

He had come in a hurry, gasping for breath, his clothes in disarray, and covered in blood.

“Rudy Astria. Are you okay?”

Ian ran towards me.

I looked at him, confused.

“Shouldn’t you be on the outskirts?”

“The outskirts are done. The others were rushing me so much that I came here first…”

Ian looked around.

“No need to look. I’ve already taken care of Aryandor.”

“What?”

“It’s complicated to explain, but basically, he won’t be coming out of there alive.”

Even if he did manage to come out alive, if there was a way to do so, it wouldn’t matter…

The last face of Aryandor I saw.

I showed him that the magic and the future he relied on could be changed at any time, that it was just ordinary magic.

I had directly denied his life.

He was a person who would not try again.

It was all his mistake, and he realized that he could have saved Beatrice but didn’t.

He was defeated.

In battle and in his beliefs.

So, he won’t struggle anymore.

No, he wouldn’t even think of it.

He would just disappear along with the holy land, engulfed in despair.

Ian let out a sigh of relief.

“Is that so… Then, is it all over?”

His face relaxed a bit.

After all, Ian was the commander of this battle.

“Ah, but we need to go to the battlefield. We need to hurry there now.”

“Oh, right. Then you rest.”

“…What?”

"…Why?"

"I will go too. I will go and…"

"…What are you talking about?"

"What?"

"Your role was to stop Aryandor, wasn't it? Then you've done your part. The fight is practically over, why would an injured person like you want to go?"

I was taken aback by Ian's words, looking at him with wide eyes.

"The fight is over. It's all over. So, what are you planning to do by going there?"

I just stared blankly at Ian.

Luna, who was supporting me, wiped away her tears and spoke up.

"That's right, it's all over now. Sniff… You really did well. Truly…"

Sniff

Haruna, standing next to us, was smiling and looking at me.

Hearing those words, the tension gradually began to fade.

The war is essentially over.

Aryandor is dead.

Everything… all that had been done is over.

"…That's right."

I realized I couldn't let go of the tension, even though it was over.

It's always been like this.

Even after finishing a task, as long as I could move, I'd focus on the next one.

All for this outcome.

For this moment.

I smiled.

“Luna, can you help me sit down…?”

“Okay…!”

I sat down on the floor, leaning against the desk.

“Then, I’ll be going now. The war needs to be wrapped up.”

“Yes, please do.”

Ian disappeared with those words, likely heading to the battlefield.

If he went, the war would certainly come to a close.

Announcing Aryandor’s death and adding his forces to the mix would certainly tip the balance on the battlefield.

“Rudy, don’t you need to be healed?”

“It doesn’t seem urgent.”

I wasn’t severely injured; I had just used a lot of mana.

“Besides, your face is a mess. Want me to clean your nose here?”

I offered my sleeve.

Luna, startled by my action, covered her face.

“Yo, you can’t say that to a girl! At least offer a handkerchief when you say something like that!”

“Why bother with that? Come here.”

I brought my sleeve to Luna's face, which was a mess, and rubbed it vigorously.

The tears on Luna's face were wiped off, but the soot on my sleeve smeared all over her face, making her look like a puppy that had rolled in the mud.

"…Pfft."

"Don't laugh after doing this!"

Luna pouted and grumbled.

Her appearance, looking like a sulky puppy, made me laugh even more.

"Phahaha!!"

"Stop laughing!"

---

The door to the room burst open.

"Oh, Rie. You're here?"

Rie widened her eyes upon seeing me lying down.

"Hey! Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"Nah, just hurt my leg a bit and exhausted from using too much mana."

"…That's a relief."

"What about Astina? She isn't hurt, is she?"

"Hurt? She's the deputy commander of the Royal Army, so of course, she's busy with the cleanup."

The end of the war didn't take long.

A few minutes after Ian left, we could hear about the rebels surrendering.

With the war over, people came to me, and I was moved to a room.

“Eh~ Senior. Why didn’t you look for me?”

Then, Yuni peeked her face through the open door.

“Yuni, you’re here?”

“Is that all? I’m a bit disappointed~.”

“You weren’t going to get hurt anyway.”

“Still~ Is it so hard to mention my name once~?”

Yuni walked towards me with a playful smile.

“But, for a war hero, this hospital room seems pretty empty.”

“Now that the war is over, what else is there?”

“Is that so?”

I looked at the two of them.

“But, you two are Princesses, right? Shouldn’t you be going?”

“My sister insisted on seeing the senior’s face so much that everyone was given a bit of time to come visit.”

At Yuni’s words, Rie’s eyes widened.

“What, what? When did I! It was you who coaxed me into coming!”

“In the end, it was you who mentioned it~. And you were the one who threw a fit.”

“I did not throw a fit! I just said there was something I needed to do briefly…”

I smiled at the two of them.

It got a bit noisy, but somehow it felt more settled.

It felt like people were telling me it's truly over now.

As I enjoyed this peace, something suddenly crossed my mind.

"Ah, Rie. I wanted to ask you something."

Rie, who was bickering with Yuni, tilted her head at my question.

"Something you want to ask?"

"How did the war end? What happened to them?"

I didn't expect it to end this easily just by announcing Aryandor's death.

I thought there would be at least some resistance left.

"Daemon? It seems he and Astina had a conversation while fighting. I vaguely heard that they were deceived by Aryandor? Something like that."

"…Is that so."

The rebels must have realized to some extent.

That Aryandor had no interest in them and had a different agenda.

No matter how much Aryandor tried to deceive and use them, they must have felt something was off from his actions and words.

The rebels would have had their suspicions.

"So, what happened to them?"

"The leaders, as well as the rest of the rebels, have been captured. They're discussing what to do with them now. I guess a couple of the leaders might not escape execution.

Well, Venderwood is as good as dead anyway…"

"Dead?"

“Not dead, but he won’t recover anymore. He’s pretty much half-dead.”

“…Is that so? What about Daemon?”

“He’s alive. Both of them have been sent to the capital, and it seems like they’ll be executed after the meeting.”

“…Is that so?”

After a moment of thought, I spoke up.

“Could I see Daemon, just for a bit?”

“Daemon?”

Rie narrowed her eyebrows at my question.

“Just for a moment. Just briefly.”

Rie looked at me disapprovingly.

I smiled at her, and her expression softened, followed by a sigh.

“…Alright. But really, just for a moment.”

# CHAPTER 300
# EPILOGUE

“Let’s enter.”

“Sure.”

The door creaked open.

We walked into the room.

It was the Academy’s Vice Principal’s office.

Inside, Professor Cromwell was organizing some documents.

Professor Cromwell was in good health, despite being bandaged in a few places. He moved around comfortably.

“Rie?… Rudy?”

“Ha ha… Hello…”

Cromwell looked at us, puzzled.

There was a good reason for that.

It was because I was being carried by Rie.

To me, the sight of being carried by Rie, who was much smaller, was ridiculous.

But there was no other way to get here.

My legs were injured, and I couldn’t use mana.

“What a sight… No, more importantly, what brings you here?”

Rie answered.

“Could we meet Daemon for a moment?”

“…Daemon?”

Cromwell furrowed his brow.

Seeing that, I spoke up.

“It’ll only be for a short while. We’re not up to anything strange.”

“It’s not hard to meet him, but I wonder if there’s really a need.”

“We just want to clear up some lingering issues.”

I wanted to put an end to all this.

“Well, I won’t stop you then.”

Cromwell walked to the back of the Vice Principal’s office.

There was a small room there.

When he opened the door to the room, there were bars.

It was a space normally used by the Vice Principal as a private room, but now it was being used as a temporary prison.

Looking inside, Daemon, blindfolded and gagged, with his body restrained, was visible.

He was covered in numerous wounds and was breathing heavily in pain.

“Rie, could you put me down?”

When I tapped Rie’s arm, she looked at me with a pout.

“I wanted to stay like this.”

"…"

"Cough."

Cromwell coughed and turned his head.

"Just for a moment."

"Hmm… Fine, I'll make an exception."

Rie, delighted about something, smiled brightly and put me down.

I sat on the floor and looked at Professor Cromwell.

He used magic, and Daemon's blindfold and gag were removed.

"Is this our first real conversation?"

I looked at Daemon and said.

Daemon frowned and quietly opened his mouth.

"Did you come to mock me?"

"Well, there's that. But I came for my own satisfaction."

"Satisfaction, huh. Fine, talk all you want. A stupid loser doesn't have a choice."

Daemon laughed bitterly.

I looked at him and said.

"I'm going to make the Empire the best country in history."

"…What?"

"Better than any other time before, the most comfortable and best place to live."

I thought the rebels' process was wrong, not the outcome they wanted.

“I will provide food and welfare to the neglected people on the outskirts of the Empire and give proper punishment to the corrupt nobles, creating the most ideal Empire.”

I continued.

“Even those without money will have access to education, talented individuals will be given high positions, and there will be no discrimination or oppression.”

Daemon narrowed his brows.

“Are you trying to comfort me?”

“Comfort? Like I said, I came to mock.”

I laughed.

“I’m going to prove it. That all of you, who sacrificed countless people and tried to turn the world upside down, were wrong. That the world can be changed without such actions.”

I didn’t like their process or their beliefs.

The sacrifice of countless people.

I despised those who killed innocent people to change the world.

“These words are my last gift to you. A final gift for the pitiful you. Just watch how the world changes. Watch how I succeed in changing the world.”

He’s going to die soon.

He’ll probably be executed in the capital of the Empire.

What happens after death, who knows?

Maybe there’s an afterlife.

Of course, I said this, but honestly, it wasn’t for him.

It was my vow.

My vow to change the world.

Daemon smirked.

“Go ahead, try. Prove it. Whether we were right or you were. I’ll be waiting on the other side.”

“Sure.”

I laughed.

---

Thud!

“Rudy! Hurry up and come out!”

“We should have left earlier.”

Two people rushed out of the carriage.

“Aren’t we late?”

“It probably hasn’t started yet.”

As soon as the two came out of the carriage, they ran at full speed.

It was their first time back at the Academy in a while, but there was no time to enjoy the scenery.

“I’m going to get an earful from Rie and Yuni…”

“That’s why I said we should go with Rie…”

“How can we? The research wasn’t finished. But we’re not completely late.”

While running, the two saw a banner hanging far away on the Auditorium.

The 103rd Liberion Academy Graduation Ceremony.

Loud noises were coming from the Auditorium where the banner was hanging.

“Ah, ah. We will now commence the Graduation Ceremony. Will the Valedictorian of the Graduates please come forward?”

Yuni, who was backstage, looked around after hearing the announcer.

“When is senior coming?”

“I don’t know. Sigh… I came here early because he insisted on leaving late. Luna said she would bring him on time.”

Rie sighed at Yuni’s words.

The announcer’s voice was heard again.

“…Valedictorian?”

“…Shouldn’t you go up?”

“Sigh…”

Rie sighed and walked up towards the stage.

-The 103rd Liberion Academy Graduation Ceremony.

Far in the distance, someone running towards the back of the stage was spotted.

“Uh… Astina.”

“What’s going on? Why is Rie going up?”

“Senior was late.”

“Late?”

Then, a person walked towards Yuni and Astina.

“What are you talking about?”

“Gulp…”

“Ah.”

Yuni and Astina broke out in cold sweat upon seeing the person’s face.

It was Cromwell, the current Principal of Liberion Academy.

Cromwell, who was originally the Vice Principal, had become the Principal after the war ended.

Well, to be exact, he was forced into the position.

The previous Principal, McDowell, had dumped the position on him.

“I told you to drag them here on time if you had to…”

“Ahaha…”

“Hmm…”

Yuni laughed awkwardly, and Astina turned her head away as if she didn’t know anything, sweating profusely on her back.

Cromwell was usually a kind and good person, but when he got angry like that, he became very troublesome.

Yuni and Astina looked at each other.

‘We need to get past this situation.’

Following Yuni’s cue, Astina nodded.

‘Yeah, I’ll get us through this.’

They communicated with their eyes, smiled, and Astina began to speak.

“Professor, being late doesn’t mean what you think.”

“What?”

Yuni continued.

“They arrived earlier but met someone they know…”

“They run into someone and that’s why they’re late for the Graduation Ceremony?”

“This is about the business Rudy is working on! It’s related to that person. Of course, the Graduation Ceremony is important, but work is more important, right?”

As Yuni was explaining, Rie began her speech on stage.

“It’s already been three years since we enrolled. We entered during the cherry blossom season…”

Rie started her speech.

Cromwell sighed as the Graduation Ceremony had already started.

“Are you sure they’re coming soon?”

“Yes~ Of course~.”

“Alright.”

Cromwell responded and walked back to his seat.

He couldn’t leave his place since the Graduation Ceremony was underway.

“Phew…”

“It looks like we’ve passed the crisis.”

Yuni and Astina said, giving each other a small high-five.

“But will they make it before the ceremony ends?”

“I don’t know about that.”

“If they don’t come…”

Astina looked at Cromwell with trembling teeth.

It was clear that dealing with Cromwell’s nagging would be a headache.

“Ah, but. It doesn’t seem like it.”

Bang!!!

Two people burst into the Auditorium.

It was Luna and Rudy.

“Pant… Pant…”

“Are we, are we late?”

The eyes of everyone in the Auditorium turned towards them.

Yuni laughed awkwardly.

“Ahaha… That’s quite the entrance, senior.”

“Could’ve at least tried to come in quietly.”

Astina grabbed her head as if it was a headache, and Rie, who was stalling for time on stage, paused for a moment at Rudy’s entrance.

“Ah… Um…”

Then, after mumbling for a bit, she smiled brightly and said,

“Let me introduce him. The Valedictorian, Rudy Astria.”

The Auditorium buzzed at Rie’s words.

“Ah, that person is…”

“Oh…”

Rudy, noticing the reaction of the crowd, adjusted his attire and walked slowly.

Cutting through the crowd, he made his way up to the stage.

Reaching Rie, Rudy got poked in the ribs by her, and she quietly said,

“I need to talk to you later.”

“…Thank you.”

Rudy quietly thanked Rie and then grabbed the voice-amplifying magical device.

“Good day. I am Rudy Astria.”

Rudy said, smiling brightly.

But sweat was running down his back.

He hadn’t prepared.

He had completely forgotten.

That as the Valedictorian, he had to say something.

It was something that shouldn’t have been forgotten, yet he had.

What to do.

He had blanked.

“…”

That’s when Rudy remembered.

The speech he gave when he first enrolled…

After a brief moment of contemplation, he made his decision.

And then he spoke.

“My time at the Academy was really fun!”

What’s the use of a long speech?

It’s only boring.

Rudy thought so and smiled broadly.

“Thank you. This has been Valedictorian, Rudy Astria! That’s all.”

-End-

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[raei: Heya, the next chap is just an author note, so I’ve posted it at the bottom instead. The next five chaps after this are side stories that I will be doing as well.]

Hello!

This is Yoon Maemi (윤매미), the author who became the Academy’s second seat.

I was supposed to post a review yesterday, but it was delayed by a day, haha…

Finally, as of yesterday, I became the Academy’s second seat.

The series is now complete.

Yesterday marked exactly one year since the start of last year’s contest.

To think it’s been a year since I started posting and reached the 300th episode… It wasn’t planned, but it turned out that way.

Regardless of the numbers, I’m just happy to have finished it!

Writing this work for a year has been truly wonderful.

It received a lot of attention and even won awards in competitions…

Though it was tough, I can confidently say these were some of the happiest days of my life.

To share a bit more about the story, it's about Rudy's growth.

Rudy, who initially cared only about his own survival, gradually grew to care for his friends, then the people of the Academy, and eventually everyone in the Empire.

He worked hard and ultimately achieved his goals.

There was a lot of growth besides that.

He helped someone, and in turn, received help.

He received one-sided help from his mentor.

And he gave one-sided help to others.

This story is about others becoming more than just 'others.'

It's about choosing the 1% chance to save someone else, even if you can survive 100% on your own.

That's the conclusion of this story.

There were some hiccups along the way, but I'm glad I didn't lose sight of the path to completion… haha

Anyway!

About the side stories, I might post it irregularly.

After posting for a year, my body's a bit worn out, and I'd like to take a few days off to relax…

The side stories, coming after a few days off, will be so sweet it'll rot your teeth…!

That's the format all the side stories will take.

So, that's it!

Until now!

This has been Yoon Maemi (윤매미), the author who became the Academy's second seat!

Thank you!

# CHAPTER 301
# SIDE STORY: THE BUSTLING HAREM MARRIAGE OPERATION (1)

Two months had passed since the Graduation Ceremony.

I had been staying at the Magic Tower since I graduated.

Before graduating, I had received the position of the Senior Researcher at the Magic Tower and had been conducting various research.

The Magic Tower was a good place for me.

I could work on politics, freely conduct research, and have a certain degree of freedom.

“Rudy, I’ve brought your coffee.”

“Ah, thanks.”

I received the tray from the apprentice wizard.

On the tray were two cups of coffee.

I took the tray and walked to my seat.

Oh, and there was another good thing about being in the Magic Tower.

Thud!

“Rudy.”

“Ah, Luna, you’re here? I just finished brewing the coffee.”

It was being able to be with Luna.

After graduation, Luna had immediately received a research position.

She had made some achievements during the war and had done numerous things during her third-year apprenticeship, earning her a corresponding position.

Of course, besides Luna, it was easy to interact and meet with others.

From the standpoint of the Magic Tower, whether it was Astina, Rie, or Yuni, it was easy to meet anyone if I stepped forward.

“Mmm, the coffee smells great!”

“Right? It’s coffee sent by Astina.”

Luna and I had tea time like this every morning.

There was no specific work time in the Magic Tower, as many people researched throughout the night.

So, having a leisurely tea time before starting work wasn’t a problem.

Luna sipped her coffee and looked out the window.

There was an awkward look in her eyes, but I just smiled and watched her.

Luna made up her mind and cleared her throat.

“Hmm! The weather is nice this morning too!”

“Yeah, it is.”

I looked outside the window.

It was the transition period from spring to summer.

The flowers were blooming beautifully, and the weather was cool, perfect for walking outside.

“Right, right! How about we have dinner together tonight? I know a restaurant…”

“Ah… That might be difficult…”

I smiled awkwardly and shook my head.

Luna let out a regretful sigh and pouted her lips.

“Is something up? You seem busy these days…”

“A bit busy, yes.”

“Busy… with work?”

“Somewhat busy.”

I said quietly, with an awkward smile.

It had been a week since Luna had started making various excuses to ask me out for meals.

Since I had been continuously rejecting without giving any specific reason, Luna became suspicious.

Luna looked dejected and hung her head.

“I see… If you have work…”

Seeing her like that made me feel guilty.

Should I postpone my work?

But I couldn’t just postpone it. There was a specific reason why I was working this hard.

“Alright… Then, I’ll be going.”

Luna said that and left my room.

“Sigh…”

I let out a deep sigh.

“Should I just tell her?”

I muttered to myself while looking out the window.

---

“Luna too?? You asked him on a date and got rejected?!”

Yuni narrowed her eyes as she spoke.

“Yeah… I’ve been asking for days, but he says no…”

“Sigh… What the hell is he doing that’s so important?”

Rie sighed beside her.

“He must be busy with work these days… Well, that can happen…”

Luna said it could happen, but her expression said otherwise.

She looked pretty upset.

While the three of them were grumbling,

Tap. Tap. Tap.

“But why are we meeting here?”

Astina, sitting at a desk, asked.

Astina was frowning and tapping her fingers on the desk.

This was Astina’s office in the Persia mansion in the capital.

“Well, we don’t really have another place to meet, do we? Please, let it slide~.”

Yuni said with a bright smile.

Although her demeanor was cute, Astina wasn’t fooled by such charm.

She had been tricked by such words many times before.

Despite having graduated from the Academy two years ago, she ended up helping with student council work and dealing with various matters using the power of the Persia family.

She had been through quite a lot.

“We could meet at the Magic Tower or the palace.”

“Rudy is at the Magic Tower, and the palace is too conspicuous.”

“I’m sorry…”

Rie shrugged her shoulders and said to Astina, while Luna awkwardly smiled and bowed her head in apology.

“More importantly, what do you think, Astina! Do you think this is acceptable?”

Yuni exaggerated her gestures as she spoke.

At this, Astina sighed and opened her mouth.

“Rudy can’t help being busy. Rie’s coronation is coming up, after all.”

Soon, Rie would ascend to the Emperor’s throne.

When the coronation ceremony takes place, the Magic Tower, would take about a week off.

It was like a consolation holiday given by the Emperor.

So, it seemed Rudy was trying to get ahead on work that needed to be done during that period.

“Even so! Can’t we even have dinner? We have to eat dinner anyway!”

At Yuni’s outcry, Astina smiled.

“Well, that could be possible.”

"…Hmm~?"

Yuni scrutinized Astina closely as she spoke.

"What's with that look?"

"Astina. Do you know something?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"There's something fishy~. Something, something…"

Yuni stretched her neck towards Astina and touched her chin.

"What smell are you talking about?"

"I have a very accurate nose for this kind of smell, you know?"

Rie looked at Yuni with a blank expression.

"Since when have you been good at smelling that kind of thing?"

"You're supposed to play along at times like these!"

"Anyway, Astina, do you know something?"

At Rie's question, Astina shrugged her shoulders.

"You'll find out in time."

"See! I knew it! You do know something!"

Yuni was fuming at Astina's response.

Luna pondered Astina's words, tilting her head.

"Find out in time…?"

---

In the dark evening, I was wearing a hood and looked around. Seeing no one around, I quietly entered the cabin in front of me.

Inside was a middle-aged man. The middle-aged man smiled slyly as I entered.

“Rudy, you’ve arrived.”

I narrowed my eyes at him and asked, “Is the item ready?”

“Hehe… Why do you ask? Follow me.”

He gestured to me, and I followed him down into the basement of the cabin.

After descending the dark staircase to the basement, he reached out his hand.

“Please wait a moment.”

He went to a corner and brought back a small box.

“Here is the item. It took quite the effort to prepare.”

“Hehe… Thank you. May I check it?”

“Yes, go ahead.”

I smiled and opened the box. Inside the box were five splendid rings.

“Ha ha ha! These are the rings I’ve put the most effort into!”

The man laughed happily, thumping his chest. I smiled broadly in response.

“Thank you. I really like them.”

This place was the home of a craftsman of fine goods in the capital.

I found out about this place about a month ago.

I was talking to Astina at the time.

Originally, we met to talk about my personal affairs.

It was related to the commerce of the capital.

Astina, befitting the Lord of the commercial city of Persia, knew a lot about various commercial aspects.

While talking about business, I also learned about this craftsman.

Although his workshop was small, his skills were so exceptional that he was raking in money in the capital.

That's when I thought this place would be perfect.

And I immediately acted on it, entrusting this craftsman with a task.

The task was to make five rings.

These were essential items for the plan I was carrying out, so I invested a large sum of money, and now I was here to see the results.

The craftsman turned on a dim lamp and looked towards me.

"Wouldn't it be better to just turn on the light and meet? Why do we have to do it like this?"

"Ha ha… Since I attract a lot of attention from many people, I need to be a bit cautious."

"Ah, must be tough on you."

"Well, it is what it is…"

I scratched my head.

"Ah, you should check if the size fits."

"Yes, I should."

I picked up a ring with a small diamond embedded in it from the box.

After trying it on a few times, I slipped the ring onto my ring finger.

I smiled, satisfied with how it fit.

“How does it look?”

“It fits perfectly. Thank you.”

“Hehe, I’m glad to hear that. But what about the other rings…”

“Ah, can I come back if there’s a problem with those?”

I asked, smiling awkwardly.

The biggest issue at the moment was that I had the rings made without getting permission from the people involved.

“Yes, of course. Just give me a heads-up, and I’ll take care of it right away! Hehe!”

The craftsman chuckled, patting his chest.

I smiled, gathered the rings, and put my hood back on.

“Thank you. I’ll be back next time.”

“Yes! Take care!”

After leaving, I looked up at the sky.

I pondered under the starry and moonlit sky.

“Ha… This should be okay, right?”

The reason I’m busy to the point of not being able to have dinner with everyone, making these rings, is because I have a plan.

Soon, Rie will be crowned as the Emperor.

After that, we’ll all become busier.

I’ll have my own things to do, and everyone will have their own tasks.

So, I decided to do something before the coronation ceremony.

The name of that plan is the Harem Marriage Operation.

It might sound a bit cringeworthy, but the operation name is very intuitive and explanatory.

Currently, there are four women around me.

All of them are attractive, and I like them all.

I can't choose just one.

So, I'll choose all of them.

It's not illegal to choose all four, right?

That was my decision.

I looked down at the ring in my hand.

"But, how do I explain that…"

I'm going to marry all of them.

I have to explain that to everyone.

Thinking about it made me feel incredibly overwhelmed.

# CHAPTER 302
# SIDE STORY: THE BUSTLING HAREM MARRIAGE OPERATION (2)

A few days later, I went to the Persia mansion in the capital to meet Astina.

We had originally made a promise around this time.

The appointment was set for business reasons.

I had consulted Astina on the commercial aspects of a project I was working on, so it was related to that.

However, the real reason for making this appointment was different.

I made the appointment at this time to tell Astina about my intentions.

To be with everyone.

To put it bluntly, I aim to spread my affections widely.

I have confirmed their feelings.

Yuni, Rie, Luna, Astina - I already know how they feel.

But that doesn't mean they would allow me to be with everyone.

Everyone has a desire to monopolize the person they love.

"Has Rudy arrived?"

When I arrived at the Persia mansion, Astina came forward with a smile in her eyes.

She was wearing casual leather clothes.

Nobles usually don't wear such leather clothes, but it was comfortable for everyday

wear, so it wasn't an inappropriate outfit for the mansion.

Of course, that didn't detract from Astina's charm.

The clothes clung tightly, highlighting her figure, and the casual atmosphere somehow stirred my heart.

"Hmm…"

Whether it was because I came to confess to her, or because of her figure-highlighting outfit, there was an awkward feeling.

"Don't just stand there, come inside."

Astina gestured for me to follow her inside. I nodded in response.

"What would you like to drink? Just coffee?"

"No, could I have something cold, please?"

"Because of the hot weather?"

"Ah… yes."

It wasn't because of the weather.

I just wanted something cold because my throat was parched.

What should I say?

I had prepared what to say, but I didn't know how to bring up the topic.

Astina moved to get it herself.

I was puzzled.

Why was she going herself?

Usually, she would have asked a maid to do it.

It was natural for the Persia family, which was almost a ducal family, to have maids for such chores.

But her going by herself just left me confused.

Astina brought back some hot tea for herself and water with ice for me.

“There are no maids in the house right now, so all I can offer is water.”

“No maids?”

“Yeah, I gave them a little break.”

“Even the maids for chores like this?”

“Yeah, everyone needs to rest. It was a bit much to give them time off during the coronation, so I sent them now.”

“I see…”

After the coronation, Astina would also take a break, so she would need people to attend to her.

Astina, who always gives her best in everything she does, was taking her rest seriously as well.

“Anyway, this isn’t what I came here to talk about, right?”

“Ah, yes. Shall we talk about work then?”

Astina and I started a serious conversation with documents laid out in front of us.

Talking about work made me feel a bit more at ease, but there was a hint of tension thinking about the hidden story I needed to bring up.

“Then, it’s best to do it this way. Should the Persia territory support the food supply?”

“Right? We’ve always done it that way.”

As time went by, we gradually wrapped up the work discussion.

“Thank you. This was very helpful.”

“Sure.”

The problem was that I couldn’t find the right timing to bring up my topic.

Wouldn’t it be too strange to mention love or marriage in the middle of a work conversation?

“Ha. Ha. Ha.”

I laughed awkwardly and looked for Astina’s reaction. Then, Astina looked at me with a pleased smile.

“Why do you look like that?”

Astina leaned her elbows on the desk and rested her chin on her hands.

She looked at me with warm eyes.

It was as if she found my hesitant demeanor amusing.

I carefully asked Astina.

“…do you know?”

“Ho-ho, know what?”

“Hmm…”

The one who taught me about jewel crafting was none other than Astina.

And if Astina, who runs a commercial territory, knew… she might have found out that I made a ring.

I looked at Astina with suspicion. Even as I stared, Astina just smiled broadly.

“So, don’t you have something to say?”

"…Yes, I do."

"Then say it… no, wait. Just wait a moment."

Saying that, Astina started rummaging through her drawer. The item that came out of Astina's drawer was…

"…A recording stone?"

"Alright. Now you can say it. Ho-ho…"

Astina said with a big smile.

"Ah, no. Senior. Why the recording stone…?"

"If not this, then what should I use? It's a once-in-a-lifetime event."

"You knew, then…"

Astina shrugged her shoulders.

"How could I not know when you were asking so much about jewel crafting? In that regard, it was your mistake for not being more cautious."

Astina was unabashed.

Not that Astina did anything wrong.

It's not like her saying that would stop me from speaking my mind.

I swallowed hard and looked at Astina.

As I silently stared at Astina, she was somewhat awkward, her laughter subsided, and her face turned red.

I gathered my courage to speak, but the recording stone in front of me caught my eye.

"Could you please put away that recording stone?"

“No! Why are you hesitating so much! Just spit it out! This is frustrating…!”

“Ahem… Okay.”

With that, I steadied myself again and began to speak.

“Astina.”

“…Yes.”

“…Would you marry me?”

As I said this, Astina’s face turned as red as her hair.

The usually cool and composed Astina was nowhere to be found.

Instead, there was only a girl who had never been in love before.

“Ah, um, ahem, uh…”

Astina hesitated and lowered her head.

Then, she briefly looked up, our eyes met, and she quickly lowered her head again, only making a sighing noise.

“…You knew I was going to say this, didn’t you?”

“I did know… but it’s different when it actually happens…!”

“What’s different…?”

“It’s the mix of joy and embarrassment when imagination becomes reality…”

Astina spoke faster and more chatteringly than usual.

Of course, she still couldn’t look me in the eyes. She just kept her head down and mumbled.

I watched Astina like this and quietly opened my mouth.

“Astina.”

“Uh… Yes…”

Astina responded, and I spoke again.

“I love you.”

“Uh…”

Astina shrank more and more. Seeing Astina turn into a little girl made me chuckle.

“Why do you keep reacting like that?”

“…”

Astina didn’t say anything and covered her flushed face with her hands. She couldn’t cover her beet-red ears and neck, though.

I teased Astina playfully.

“Senior, you have to answer.”

“…Okay, I like it.”

Astina replied in a voice that seemed to retreat into itself.

I teased her further.

“When you talk, you should look into the other person’s eyes, Senior.”

Astina quietly peered through her fingers. Her eyes were shaking, and it seemed like tears were about to form.

“Okay, I like it…!”

I smiled at Astina’s reaction.

“Why are you so cute today when you’re always so dignified?”

“Cute?”

“Yes, you’re very cute. So cute, I want to bite you.”

“Bite…???”

Astina’s reaction to every word was cuter than ever before.

Of course, I might be biased, but what does it matter? Actually, I might even prefer it if she only looked beautiful in my eyes.

I wanted to enjoy this sight all to myself. Despite my wishes, Astina looked objectively beautiful at this moment.

Even in her plain leather clothes, even without any fancy decorations on her, she was more beautiful than ever before.

“What are you staring at like that!”

“What’s wrong with it? I should etch this beautiful sight into my eyes. Oh, I don’t even need just my eyes for that.”

I looked at the recording stone laid out in front of me. I turned the recording stone, which was facing me, towards Astina.

“Look here.”

“What, what… Put, put it away. Pu…”

“Come on, Astina wanted to capture my appearance too, right? I feel the same way.”

Astina had dug her own grave.

“Smile now.”

“Put it, put it away…!”

Astina flailed her arms, yelling at me. I just dodged her arms with a grin.

After teasing Astina for a bit…

"…Did you enjoy teasing me like that?"

"It's not about enjoying the teasing, but because you looked so pretty that I felt good."

"What… How can you say such things so easily…!"

"Right? It was a bit hard before, but once you do it, it becomes easy."

I had never expressed affection like this to anyone else.

Of course, being busy with other things played a part, but it also happened because I didn't keep at it.

But once I started, expressions of affection flowed. Or, maybe I had been holding back all along.

I had worried a lot and wondered if it was right for me to be with everyone.

Expressing affection to someone and then rejecting them would cause a lot of hurt. I was afraid of this.

"But it's nice. Saying it out loud feels somewhat refreshing."

"…But you."

Astina narrowed her eyes and looked at me. I tilted my head in response.

"Yes?"

"You didn't come here just to say that, did you?"

"…?"

I stared blankly at Astina and then widened my eyes.

I had been focused on confessing and had completely forgotten something important.

"A war hero like you shouldn't be so careless…"

“Ahem… That’s something my wives can take care of.”

“Wives…”

Yes. What I hadn’t mentioned was whether it was okay to marry everyone together.

I originally planned to explain this while confessing, but I forgot because I was flustered.

I straightened myself up and looked at Astina again. Astina sighed and looked into my eyes. I asked with a smile removed from my face.

“So… can I be with everyone?”

Astina glared at me.

But it wasn’t the look of someone who sees a person they dislike.

Though she was glaring, her eyes were filled with affection.

“Ah…”

“…”

“How would you feel if I dated another man?”

“…It would tear my heart apart. I would do whatever it takes to stop it.”

I had already made up my mind about everything. I liked everyone. I had accepted that.

“So, how do you think I would feel?”

“…Probably similar.”

“Similar, yes. But not to that extent.”

At that, I widened my eyes.

“I knew to some extent. I was actually afraid of not being chosen. You could have

chosen just one."

I looked at Astina with a bit of anxiety. Astina saw this and gave me a small smile.

"You don't need to make that face. My answer is simple."

"…?"

"Do as you wish. I won't actively stop you."

"…Really?"

"Yes. It doesn't seem like stopping you would work anyway. After giving it some thought, such a life might not be so bad."

Hearing that made me feel completely at ease. A warm feeling spread throughout my body.

"Astina!"

"Whoa!"

Feeling this, I rushed towards Astina.

"What is this…!"

Astina was tightly hugged in my arms, her eyes wide open.

Her face, which had just returned to its original color, reddened again.

I wanted to see Astina's expression, but I also didn't want to let go of the warmth of her body.

I quietly said, feeling Astina's warmth.

"Thank you."

My body was trembling slightly.

All the tension had been released, leaving me feeling a bit dazed.

Feeling this, Astina, who was surprised, raised her hand to my back.

“You must have been very anxious.”

“How could I not be? I’m undertaking such a reckless challenge.”

“Haven’t you faced even more reckless challenges before?”

“This challenge was more nerve-wracking for me than those.”

I said, laughing softly while still holding Astina. Astina gently patted my back.

“Give it your best shot. You still have 3 more to go, right?”

“Yes, I will try.”

I stayed quietly in Astina’s embrace for a while.

It was truly a comforting time while we were hugging. After a moment, I gently pushed Astina away from the hug. Then, holding Astina’s hand, I spoke.

“I’ll be going now.”

“Are you busy?”

“Yes, there’s a lot to prepare.”

Astina gave a toothy smile. I brought my face close to Astina’s. With a soft touch,

“!!!!!!”

It was a gentle bump.

Astina’s eyes widened as she clutched her lips.

I smiled at her reaction and reached into my pocket.

“I have something for you.”

Out of the pocket came a small ring.

A ring with a ruby, crafted by a jeweler, made especially for Astina.

I took Astina's hand and lifted it. Then, I carefully slid the ring onto her ring finger.

"Please, don't ever take off this ring."

I said and stepped back.

"I'll be going then."

I waved at a dazed Astina and headed out.

---

"Hehe…"

After Rudy left, Astina, lying on the bed, fiddled with her lips and looked at the ring on her hand.

She wore an uncharacteristically silly smile, continuously playing with the ring.

How many hours had passed? Astina, smiling contentedly, spoke up.

"Come in!"

She yelled out loud, but no sound came in response. Feeling something was off, Astina was about to yell again.

"Come in…"

That's when Astina realized.

There were no servants in the mansion. That's right.

Astina had forgotten one thing. The reason she had given all the servants a holiday.

Despite the empty house, Astina had just let Rudy go.

"This can't be…"

Astina rushed to the bathroom.

The bathtub was filled with water, warmed by a heat preservation spell. Everything was prepared for their first night together.

She had sent all the servants on holiday, despite the inconvenience.

The bathtub was ready with warm water.

And the master bedroom, unused by Astina, was beautifully decorated. Yet, Astina had just let Rudy go.

“This, this can’t be…!”

Astina was caught off guard by Rudy’s many advances and forgot her own plans.

Astina sighed deeply.

“…Is there no other way?”

The opportunity wasn’t just for today.

Now that she was destined to be his wife, there would be almost endless time to be together with Rudy.

Astina soon looked at the bathtub with a small smile.

“The husband will take care of it.”

The thought of taking the lead herself was fun, but imagining Rudy leading was equally entertaining.

“Since the bathwater is already made… I might as well use it.”

With that, Astina undressed and stepped into the warm bathwater, and after the bath, she was able to sleep very comfortably.

However, there was a problem. The next day when Astina went to work.

“Ah, Lady Persia, welcome…”

Astina's female secretary was about to bow and greet her when her eyes saw something that should not have been seen.

The ruby ring on her ring finger.

It was on her ring finger. The meaning was…

The female secretary carefully lifted her head.

"Yes, good morning."

"!!!!!!!!!!"

The scent of roses wafting from her body and her face, more radiant than usual.

"Lady Persia…!!!"

"Hm?"

"Could it be… No, no, it's nothing."

Astina's secretary swallowed the words she wanted to say.

And thought to herself, 'Rudy and she have finally crossed the line! This is big news!'

Astina's secretary decided she needed to share this exciting news with everyone.

# CHAPTER 303
# SIDE STORY: THE BUSTLING HAREM MARRIAGE OPERATION (3)

“The Duke of Persia has…”

“What? So, Rudy and she are an item now?”

“Shh! Shh! Keep your voice down.”

“Oh, no. Then what about our Princess…”

“Hey! Hey!”

The maid who had spoken first pointed towards the corridor.

There, Rie was standing.

“Hem hem!”

“Did, did you cough? Good morning, Your Highness…!”

Rie stared at the two maids before speaking.

“It’s not a good morning.”

“Wha!”

“Gah…”

Though the maids looked shocked, Rie walked past them without another word.

Sigh…

Rie sighed.

She had already heard the rumors about Astina.

She couldn't know exactly what had happened.

All she knew was that they all had a conversation together.

While it seemed like no one else knew anything, Astina seemed to be in the know.

Had she known all along?

Had Rudy chosen Astina?

With these thoughts, Rie entered her office.

Then, she saw a letter on her desk.

"What's this then."

The letter on the desk was from Rudy.

It contained an invitation to dine together that evening.

Could it be…

Rie was overwhelmed with anxiety as she thought about the spreading rumors and the letter.

Was this meant to be a final goodbye?

That was the only conclusion she could draw.

Such thoughts made her heart ache.

'Maybe I should just not go.'

Would avoiding it make things any better?

Even with these thoughts…

Rie had no choice but to head to the place Rudy had set for their meeting.

Rudy had called Rie to a small restaurant in a quiet corner of the capital, away from the bustling preparations for the upcoming coronation ceremony.

“Huh?”

While waiting for Rudy, an unexpected person showed up.

“Unni?”

It was Yuni.

Rie was puzzled by Yuni’s sudden appearance.

“Why are you here?”

“…Why are you here?”

They looked at each other, both with displeasure on their faces.

“I’m here because I have an appointment with Rudy.”

Rie said, looking at Yuni.

Yuni was wearing a pink dress she usually wouldn’t wear, as if trying to look good for someone.

Yuni narrowed her eyes and looked at Rie, then spoke.

“…Me too?”

“What?”

There was nothing about this in the letter.

Then why was someone else there?

The presence of another person at Rudy’s meeting place upset them, but what really soured their mood was the rumor related to Astina.

Rie pondered deeply before her eyes widened in realization.

“Could it be…”

A dreadful thought crossed her mind.

Had he called them both here with the intention of settling everything at once?

Then, could Luna also be here?

As Rie was lost in thought,

“Oh, both of you made it?”

“…Rudy?”

“Ah, senior!”

Rudy, dressed sharply in a suit, appeared.

Yuni and Rie were surprised to see Rudy dressed up.

Rudy usually didn’t dress up like this. He worked in research at the Magic Tower, and dressing up wasn’t his style; he found it cumbersome.

“Shall we go in?”

“Huh?”

“…Why?”

Rie glanced around, looking puzzled.

“Did you only call the two of us?”

“Yeah. Ah, sorry I didn’t tell you I invited two people. There was a reason.”

Rudy bowed his head, sincerely apologizing.

The thought ‘He didn’t invite Luna?’ crossed Rie’s mind.

And seeing him genuinely apologizing.

Was this an attempt to cut us off?

Rie had many questions.

“Well, that happens. Shall we go in then?”

Yuni said this and clung to Rudy’s arm.

“You, you!”

Rie was shocked by Yuni’s action and looked at Rudy.

The Rudy she knew would have been flustered and pushed Yuni away.

“Let’s go in.”

But Rudy didn’t do that.

He didn’t push Yuni away and let her cling to his arm.

“????”

Rie was baffled by Rudy’s behavior.

“Yep… Huh??”

Rie wasn’t the only one with a confused expression.

Yuni, who had hooked her arm with Rudy’s, also looked confused.

“Welcome.”

As they entered the restaurant, a man who appeared to be the manager greeted them.

“A table has been prepared for you inside. Please, go ahead.”

“Thank you.”

Rudy responded with a bright smile.

Rie was puzzled by Rudy's demeanor.

Rie's face is well-known to everyone in the Empire.

Naturally, Yuni and Rudy were in the same situation.

Despite this, was it okay for them to be seen together by ordinary people?

If Rudy was to marry Astina, they shouldn't be seen together.

Dining with the future Emperor of the Empire and her sister?

And with the sister hooked arm in arm?

If they were really planning to marry Astina, such a scene shouldn't be shown to ordinary people.

'What is he thinking?'

"Please, this way."

The manager led them to a private room inside the restaurant.

A lavish meal was prepared there.

"Have a good time."

After greeting them, the manager left, and Rudy gestured towards the seats.

"Let's sit down."

Then, Yuni looked up at Rudy and spoke.

"I want to sit next to senior."

Yuni stated boldly.

And Rudy just shrugged his shoulders.

"Sure. Do as you please."

“Okay~.”

‘Hmm…?’

Rie looked at Rudy with a meaningful gaze.

“What? Something wrong?”

“No, nothing…”

Rie shook her head in response to Rudy’s question but then stopped herself.

‘Right, I need to figure out what Rudy is thinking.’

With that thought, Rie decided to speak up.

“No! I have something to say.”

“Hm?”

Rie clenched her fist and looked at Rudy.

“I also want to sit next to you.”

“Next to me?”

“Yes…! Next to you…”

Rie, although embarrassed, said what she needed to say.

Normally, Rudy would…

“Sure. Do as you wish.”

“…Senior? Sister?”

Yuni reacted to Rudy’s words.

Yuni looked back and forth between Rie and Rudy, her eyes wide with surprise.

“Did I suddenly enter another world? Or is this a dream?”

Yuni looked bewildered.

Rudy chuckled and tapped Yuni’s head.

“What dream? Let’s just eat.”

So, the three of them ended up sitting side by side.

Yuni ate her meal with a puzzled face, glancing at Rudy and Rie.

Rudy ate with a pleased smile.

Rie was so lost in thought she couldn’t even tell if the food was going into her mouth or her nose as she moved her utensils.

‘What’s going on? What is this? Is there something I don’t know? Or is it really a dream, like Yuni said?’

As Rie was eating, Rudy stared at her intently.

“Hm?”

Rudy reached out to her.

He then tucked Rie’s hair behind her ear.

“?!?!?!”

“You might eat your hair.”

With warm eyes and a tender gesture, Rie’s eyes widened.

Her face flushed hot, and her mind couldn’t understand the situation.

After everything that happened with Astina…

Even trying to think about it calmly and objectively, it was a situation hard to understand. Rudy’s affectionate actions brought Rie’s thought process to a stop.

As Rie's eyes began to spin, Rudy looked at her warmly.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, no! Uh, nothing?"

"Really? Tell me if there's something. I'm worried."

"Gasp…!"

Under normal circumstances, such words from Rudy would have been enough to melt Rie.

Well, they still did.

"…Hehe. Uh…"

The corners of her mouth twitched, trying to form a foolish smile.

Despite her best efforts to control her expression, it didn't work well.

"…Unni, what kind of face is that?"

"What, what…"

The corners of her mouth were as raised as they could be, but kept trying to fall, creating a strange expression.

Even though Rie was making a strange face, Rudy's eyes were dripping with honey.

Yuni sighed as she looked at them both.

"I can't figure out what's going on here…"

In such an odd atmosphere, the three of them finished their meal.

"Oh, right."

After finishing the meal to some extent, Rudy looked back and forth between the two and started to speak.

“I’ve prepared something special.”

“Prepared something?”

“Oh! Is it a gift?”

“Well, it is sort of a gift.”

Yuni’s eyes sparkled at Rudy’s response.

“What is it? Is it something good?”

“Kind of? Just a moment.”

Rudy got up from his seat and went towards a bag at one corner of the room.

‘A gift… ‘

Yuni was filled with anticipation, but Rie harbored a sense of unease.

She was afraid that Rudy might suddenly drop a bombshell.

Rudy started rummaging through the bag, and Rie and Yuni watched him intently, each with their own thoughts.

“Here.”

And what Rudy pulled out of the bag was

“A mask?”

It was a mask that could cover the face and a light hood.

Rie and Yuni stared blankly at it.

Rudy smiled and handed it to them.

“Here, put this on.”

“This?”

“What are you planning?”

Rudy gestured with a meaningful look on his face.

“You’ll see if you come.”

# CHAPTER 304
# SIDE STORY: THE BUSTLING HAREM MARRIAGE OPERATION (4)

“Wow…”

Yuni couldn’t help but marvel as she looked around.

Rudy smiled at her reaction.

“Haven’t had the chance to come out because of how busy it’s been lately, huh?”

Rie opened her mouth in awe as she looked around.

“Here, have some skewers! Eat before you go!”

“It’s not a festival without these…!”

“Hey you! Try this before you leave!”

The streets were bustling with a huge crowd and lively atmosphere.

Countless stalls were spread out along the roadside.

It truly was the scene of a festival.

“There’s still some time left until the coronation ceremony…”

“I didn’t know, but apparently, it’s like this for almost a month.”

The Emperor’s coronation was the Empire’s biggest event.

A major celebration that occurred roughly every 50 to 60 years.

People from every region would gather in the capital to witness the Emperor’s coronation, a once-in-a-lifetime event, putting aside their work to enjoy the festival.

“Everyone’s gathering to celebrate you becoming the Emperor. It wouldn’t do if you didn’t enjoy yourself.”

Rudy, wearing a mask, was smiling, though his expression was hard to see.

“But, won’t wearing this kind of outfit at the festival arouse suspicion?”

Rie asked, tapping her clothes and mask.

“With so many people coming from different regions, this level of oddity isn’t even considered suspicious.”

Every region brought its own crowd.

With each region having its own culture, and thus a variety of outfits, people didn’t pay much mind to those wearing masks or hoods.

Rudy grabbed the wrists of Yuni and Rie, standing on either side of him.

“Huh?”

“Senior?”

Holding their wrists, Rudy led the way, saying,

“Shall we go have some fun?”

Rie and Yuni were pulled into the crowd by Rudy.

Despite the crowd, they didn’t get separated because Rudy was holding onto their wrists tightly.

“Senior! Let’s go see that!”

“Alright, let’s go.”

Yuni quickly adapted to the situation.

She looked around at the various stalls and gradually started dragging Rudy and Rie along.

“Look over there!”

“Yeah, yeah. That place?”

Yuni led Rudy and Rie to a souvenir shop spread out on the roadside.

“My Lord! Do you see anything you like?”

As the merchant welcomed them, Yuni smiled and browsed through the souvenirs laid out on the mat.

Then she said,

“I’ll take everything here!”

“…What?”

“Everything! All of it!”

Yuni’s declaration surprised not only the merchant but also Rudy and Rie.

“Hey, you should only buy what you really like.”

“What? I like everything here.”

“But… if you buy everything, how will you carry it? And others might want to buy something too…”

Rudy made this point, and the quick-witted merchant waved his hand.

“My Lord! I’ll pack everything up for you. Just give me the address, and I’ll have it delivered!”

“Oh! That sounds great!”

Yuni smiled brightly and looked at Rudy.

Rie made a ‘hmph’ sound at his side.

“Ah…”

Rudy sighed and looked at the merchant.

It was unnecessary to lecture on such a day.

After all, buying everything from these street stalls wouldn't make much of a dent in Rudy's wallet, so he decided to indulge Yuni's request.

"How much is it?"

"Uh… Just 25 gold will do! Where should I send it?"

At the merchant's question, Yuni promptly responded.

"Just take it to the Royal palace."

"…What?"

"To the Royal palace. The knights will take care of it if you give it to them."

"????"

"……"

Rudy quietly approached the puzzled merchant and said,

"Just pack it up roughly and deliver it to a knight at the Royal palace. You know what I mean, right?"

The merchant's eyes widened as he nodded vigorously.

"Ah, understood. Thank you so much. It's an honor, should I at least greet…"

"No need for formalities. We're out incognito, after all. Oh, here's the money."

Rudy paid the merchant, bowing slightly as he did so.

As they moved away from the stall, Rie asked,

"But why buy stuff here? You don't need these kinds of things."

“They might come in handy somewhere~. Maybe for a disguise later on~. Right, senior?”

“Yeah, yeah. It’s a good day for it.”

“…Hmph.”

Rie glared at Rudy, who wasn’t siding with her, and Rudy awkwardly avoided eye contact with a forced smile.

Yuni watched the two of them and chuckled playfully.

“Unni, are you upset because senior took my side?”

“Upset? I’m not…”

“Ah, you are upset.”

“I said I’m not!”

As Rie pressed her lips together muttering, Rudy smiled.

“Shall we go somewhere else?”

“Yeah…”

Rie responded to Rudy’s suggestion and was about to move on when she felt something warm in her hand.

“Huh?”

Rudy’s hand had slipped into hers.

Rudy, who had been holding onto their waists, now firmly held Rie’s hand.

Rie looked at Rudy with a puzzled face, and Rudy looked back with a smiling face.

“Hmm…”

Rie blushed slightly and averted her gaze.

“Senior! Hurry up!”

“Okay, coming.”

Urged by Yuni, Rudy looked at Rie.

“Shall we go?”

Rie didn’t respond but moved along willingly.

After wandering around for a while, the crowd started to thin, and the street stalls began to close.

“Today was so much fun~!”

“Huh?”

Yuni clung to Rudy and said this, and Rudy cocked his head in response.

Rudy looked puzzled, prompting Yuni to ask,

“Why?”

“We haven’t even reached the main event yet.”

“It’s not over?”

“Is there more to do?”

Rie joined in the conversation.

The shops were closing, and people were heading home.

It seemed like there was nothing left to do here.

“Come this way for a moment.”

Rudy walked slowly, with Yuni and Rie following him.

He led them to a bench with a clear view of the sky.

“It’s about to start.”

“What is?”

“Just wait.”

Rudy glanced up at the sky for a moment.

Just then,

“It’s starting.”

Following Rudy’s words, small fireworks shot into the sky.

“Ah…”

“Fireworks?”

Boom――

The small firework exploded in the sky with a refreshing sound.

Fireworks. Literally, flowers of fire bloomed in the sky.

Bang! Bang!

Dozens of fireworks soared up.

Bright fireworks embroidered the dark sky.

Rudy smiled as he watched the fireworks, then turned to look at Yuni and Rie.

“Do you guys like fireworks?”

Both opened their mouths and nodded.

“That’s why we’re here.”

Rudy knew from before that Rie liked fireworks, and it was natural to think Yuni, her sister, would enjoy them too.

Rie watched the fireworks bursting behind Rudy.

Then she turned her head to look at Yuni beside her.

Yuni was smiling softly back at Rie.

Rie's fondness for fireworks stemmed from a childhood memory.

Watching fireworks with their parents before any royal or political disputes began.

That memory deeply resonated with Rie.

A time when the family was close and harmonious.

Though various reasons had driven Yuni and her apart, those memories remained precious.

It was the most carefree and untroubled time in Rie's life.

The sound of fireworks echoed in their ears.

Despite the loud noise, it felt incredibly serene.

No voices could be heard, only the spectacular fireworks filled their view.

"This is nice…"

Rie whispered quietly.

Yuni leaned on Rie's shoulder.

"Really…"

As if they had never quarreled, they looked just like loving sisters.

Rudy smiled, watching them.

This was the moment Rudy had hoped for.

For some time, these two had been at odds, unable to get along.

Whatever the reason, there was nothing good about them being on bad terms.

So, he deliberately invited them out.

Wandering through the bustling market.

And finally, bringing them closer together by showing them the fireworks.

Rudy slipped his hand into his pocket, waiting for the fireworks to end.

As the fireworks were about to finish,

Rudy sneakily glanced at Rie and Yuni.

They were leaning on each other, looking at the sky.

Rudy slowly approached them.

“Hm?”

“It’s over now…”

As Yuni and Rie were about to speak,

Rudy knelt on one knee in front of them.

“?!?!”

“What, what’s that pose for…!”

“What do you think?”

Rudy pulled a small box from his pocket.

“Ah…”

Rie sighed upon seeing the box.

From Rudy’s posture, it was clear what was inside.

A ring.

Nobody knew what had happened with the rumors about Astina, but given the current situation, it was certain there was a ring inside.

But who was its intended recipient?

There were two of them here.

Rie sneakily glanced at Yuni beside her.

If she were to receive the ring…

Or if Yuni were to…

Neither option was what Rie wanted.

Rudy, unaware of Rie's feelings or not, tried to open the small box.

Thud!

"…?"

"Unni?"

Rie quickly moved to stop Rudy's hand from opening the box.

"Not now… Don't do it…"

"…Huh?"

"Don't do it!"

"What are you talking about?"

Rudy was confused as his attempt to open the box was thwarted.

"Later… It doesn't have to be now. Let's talk first…"

"Oh, why? The timing is…"

“Just don’t do it…!”

Rudy tried to remove Rie’s hand,

And Rie tried to physically stop Rudy’s hand.

Confused, Rudy quickly tried to open the box, but ended up dropping it.

“Ah!”

The box fell to the ground.

Bang!!!!!!!

Just then, a very large firework exploded behind Rudy.

“…?”

“Huh?”

However, Rie and Yuni’s attention didn’t shift to the large firework.

Only the fallen box and the two rings on the ground were in their view.

“……”

Rudy looked back and forth between the rings and the fireworks with a dismayed face.

“Why… are there two?”

Rie exclaimed with wide eyes.

She couldn’t make sense of the situation.

‘Two, does one mean he intended to wear one himself? No, no… Normally, when giving such a ring, doesn’t one not wear it themselves…?’

Rie’s gaze shifted to the ring finger on Rudy’s hand.

A ring was indeed snugly fitted on his ring finger.

Meaning, there were three rings present.

As Rie was trying to figure this out on her own,

'Damn it… '

Rudy looked at the rings with the face of someone who had lost everything.

Rudy missed the timing and even dropped the rings on the ground…

The romantic atmosphere turned awkward.

Yuni, with a confused expression, looked at the two before bending down to pick up the rings.

"What are you two doing?"

"……"

"……"

Then, she slipped one of the rings onto her ring finger.

"Wow! This is beautiful. So, this one is for…"

Yuni handed the remaining ring to Rie.

"Ah…?"

"This is yours, right, unni?"

"Uh, yeah…"

"Unni, try it on."

"Uh, okay?"

"Ah, really. Should I help you? Oh! Right, right. I shouldn't do it."

Yuni removed the ring she had put on and, with a bright smile, offered it to Rudy.

“It should be you who puts it on.”

Rudy snapped back to reality at her words.

“Right. I should be the one to do it.”

Gently, Rudy took Yuni’s hand.

And he slid the ring onto her finger.

After putting on the ring, Rudy looked at Yuni’s face.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?”

Yuni teased with a smirk.

“Hmm…”

Rudy cleared his throat and looked directly into Yuni’s eyes.

“Yuni, will you marry me?”

“……!!”

Yuni’s expression turned from shock to one that looked like she was about to cry.

It was a face Rudy had never seen before. Yuni had always been sly and managed to handle everything with a sly grin.

He had not expected such a reaction from her.

“Yuni, are you okay?”

“I’m, I’m fine…”

Yuni stammered, her expression flustered.

Rudy smiled and approached Yuni.

“You look like you’re about to cry.”

“I wasn’t going to cry!”

Yuni’s voice was tinged with a cry.

“So, will you marry me?”

“……Yes. I’d be glad to. If you’re asking, how could I refuse?”

Yuni tried to sound playful and sly as usual, but her voice, mixed with tears, lacked her typical ease.

She was just trying to appear as natural as possible, which was endearing.

Rudy smiled and said,

“Thank you. For accepting.”

As Rudy was looking at Yuni,

“Hey…”

A voice came from the side.

It was Rie, her face flushed.

Avoiding Rudy’s gaze, she extended her hand.

“Me too…”

Rie had now grasped the whole situation.

Rudy took Rie’s extended hand.

“Even though you said not to open the box.”

“…I didn’t know, that’s why.”

Rie blushed at Rudy’s teasing.

“Anyway.”

Rudy, holding the remaining ring, knelt on one knee in front of Rie.

Rie, who was soon to become the Emperor, was used to seeing people kneel before her.

Vassals and knights had knelt before her several times, swearing their loyalty.

However, this moment felt entirely different from any before.

Her heart pounded as she found it hard to meet Rudy’s gaze.

Rudy presented the ring to Rie.

“Will you marry me?”

Rie responded in a barely audible voice,

“…Yes.”

Her voice was more tense than ever.

Rudy smiled and slipped the ring onto Rie’s finger.

“Thank you,”

“……”

Just then, fireworks erupted behind Rudy.

Bang──!

Boom, boom!!

“Wow…!”

“Ah…”

It was the biggest firework display they had ever seen.

Rie and Yuni exclaimed in admiration again.

“I might have messed the start, but I somehow managed to finish it well…”

Rudy let out a sigh of relief, talking to himself.

Despite a somewhat messy proposal, it ended successfully.

---

After completing all their plans, Rie, Yuni, and Rudy were about to head back.

Rudy led the way, followed by Rie.

At the end, Yuni, who had been sitting till the last moment, stared blankly at the ring and then realized something.

“Senior, you gave one of these to Astina too, right?”

Rudy, who was leading, suddenly stopped.

“Oh, right. That rumor about Astina…”

Yuni’s comment made Rie put all the pieces together.

The rumors about Astina.

And the truth behind those rumors.

“Ah…”

Rudy let out a regretful sigh.

He realized,

The brief interlude during the fireworks,

Why it was there, what he had planned to do during that time.

He had forgotten to explain everything due to Rie’s sudden action.

"……"

"…Senior?"

"…Rudy."

Cold sweat ran down Rudy's back.

Quietly, he turned around.

Yuni and Rie were squinting, staring at him.

---

The next day,

At the Magic Tower, a girl was staring blankly up at the sky, puzzled.

"…What?"

That girl was Luna.

She was puzzled because of what she had heard people saying.

"Hey, Princess Rie and Princess Yuni got married."

"What? Both of them? With whom?"

"With the same person, they say."

"Really? That's quite unusual. So, are there going to be two weddings before the coronation ceremony? Didn't they say there's a wedding in the Persia family too? You know, the one who recently took the position."

"Oh, that person is marrying the same person too."

"…What?"

Luna mused over these words, then quietly bowed her head, clutching it and shouting,

“…What??????”

# CHAPTER 305
# SIDE STORY: THE BUSTLING HAREM MARRIAGE OPERATION (5)

“Now, I just need to talk to Luna.”

I had spoken to everyone except Luna.

Luna was the only person left.

I sat in the lab, looking towards the door.

Just a short walk through this door, and I would find Luna’s lab.

But the closer the location, the harder it became to approach.

Luna and I saw each other’s faces every day.

Because we interacted so routinely, I worried about how to start the conversation.

“It feels a bit too casual to just bring it up… But then, it seems too serious to suddenly make it a big deal…”

I thought hard about it.

How could I bring it up without it being awkward?

I couldn’t come up with a good idea like I did with the others.

As for Luna’s hobbies, all she did was research magic.

She didn’t have any particular hobbies.

But if you ask what she likes, she enjoys eating?

Luna eats well, but she looks happier than usual when she eats something delicious.

“Maybe I should look for a good restaurant?”

Sitting still wouldn’t give me any good ideas.

So, I decided to move around and look for one.

If I found a restaurant first and looked around the area, maybe something would come to mind.

---

“What happened…”

Luna had waited all day after hearing the rumor.

She didn’t go to see Rudy; she just stayed in her lab alone.

But Rudy didn’t come.

“Something… something must have gone wrong?”

Rudy was a perfectionist in work matters but often a klutz in daily life.

This time too, it must have been that Rudy forgot to tell her…

Suddenly!

“That can’t be!!!”

Luna stood up abruptly.

How could she have forgotten something like this?

Of course, there was a misunderstanding.

Rudy was unaware of the rumors that he had gotten engaged to someone else.

The rumors started because he hadn’t officially announced any marriage, nor was he seen going out with anyone.

“Sigh…”

Luna was left alone in a state of gloom.

Knock, knock.

“Lady Luna?”

“Who is it?”

“It’s your maid, Cirelle. A visitor has come for you. I was informed at the front gate.”

“A visitor?”

“They said it’s Lady Riku and Lady Ena…”

Luna’s eyes widened, and she hastily opened the door.

“Oh, it’s really you! Where are you now?”

Luna ran quickly to the front gate.

There, Luna’s close friends, Riku and Ena, were waiting.

“Riku! Ena!”

“Luna! It’s been so long!!!”

“Luna, you haven’t changed at all.”

The last time Luna saw Riku and Ena was at the Graduation Ceremony, but it had been nearly a year since they had spent time together.

“How have you been!”

Ena responded with a smile to this question.

“I went back to the place I was interning at.”

“Ah~! To the researcher side?”

Ena was dressed in a robe, typical for scholars.

Ena, who had always been suited for research, had become a researcher affiliated with the Academy's Alchemy Department.

"What about you, Riku?"

"I'm just traveling around~. After rolling around in the Academy, I needed some time off~."

"Sigh. Do you know how hard it is to get a job through the Academy's placement… Just go back to where you were interning."

"Pfft! I can't waste my youth in such a place! I'm going to enjoy being unemployed a bit longer!"

"Ahaha… That's so like you, Riku."

Luna laughed awkwardly at Riku and Ena's conversation.

"Speaking of which."

"Right, right! Luna!"

Both of them turned to Luna, their eyes filled with curiosity.

""What happened with Rudy?""

Both asked simultaneously, as if they had agreed on it beforehand.

"Rudy's marriage news has been quite the talk lately, hasn't it?"

"Yeah. That's why I came."

"……"

Luna slowly looked at them and then made a gloomy face.

"What should I do?"

---

After guiding Riku and Ena to the reception room, Luna chatted with them.

From how she had been doing lately to why they came to visit.

The reason Riku and Ena came was somewhat obvious.

The famous story of Rudy's marriage among the nobility.

They rushed over after hearing the news.

"He didn't say anything to you?"

Riku and Ena looked incredulous after hearing the full story from Luna.

"What! How can that be! Where is Rudy now! I'm going to go straight to him and…"

"Riku, wait."

Ena calmed the fuming Riku and pondered.

"But why wouldn't he say anything to you?"

Luna quietly opened her mouth in response to Ena's question.

"I don't know either."

Luna's affection for Rudy wasn't something new.

Rudy hadn't responded to it and was planning to marry someone else.

That was the strangest fact.

"As far as I know, Rudy isn't that bad of a guy."

"That's true…"

"He might be a bit clueless, but not to the extent that such a situation would arise."

“Right…”

“I think there might be some misunderstanding.”

Luna had somewhat guessed this might be the case.

“So, the rumor might be false?”

“It doesn’t seem so. If it were really a false rumor, the royal family or the Persia dukedom wouldn’t just sit quietly.”

“Then…?”

“It seems you’re indeed in a very disadvantageous and urgent situation.”

It was a thunderbolt out of the blue.

“I guess I really…”

“But!”

As Luna was about to despair and tear up, Ena reached out her hand.

“It’s also important that it’s not over yet.”

“…Not over yet?”

“Rudy hasn’t confessed to you, but that doesn’t mean he’s rejected you.”

If Rudy really didn’t have feelings for Luna, he would have apologized before.

But he didn’t.

This meant there was still a chance for Luna.

“So, Luna! What should you do in this situation!”

Caught off guard by Ena’s sudden question, Luna tilted her head.

“What should I do?”

That's when Riku excitedly raised her hand.

"Miss Ena! I have the answer!"

"Yes, Riku! Let's hear it!"

"The answer is for Luna to make the first move!"

Ena smiled at Riku's response.

"Luna, you heard that?"

Luna bit her lip quietly.

Nothing changes if you just sit still.

You can't wait forever for Rudy's answer.

Gather your courage and make the first move…

"…I'll speak up first."

---

The next day.

"Luna?"

Luna went straight to Rudy's office.

"Ru, Rudy! Would you like to have dinner with me? Tonight…!"

"Oh, that works out perfectly."

"…Huh?"

"I found a nice restaurant. Want to go there?"

"Oh, yes! Tha, that sounds great. I mean…"

“Great, then let’s meet in front of the Magic Tower after work. Okay?”

“Uh, yes!”

Luna was a bit startled by Rudy’s suggestion.

Originally, she had planned to take Rudy to a restaurant she had found.

She intended to proceed with the plan at a nice place recommended by Ena and Riku, but she ended up nodding along when Rudy made his sudden proposal.

Due to Luna’s nature, she didn’t know how to refuse an offer, hence this development.

But it wasn’t a complete derailment of her plan, so no big issue there.

After all, the choice of restaurant wasn’t the most important part.

Time quickly passed, and it was time to leave work.

“Oh, Luna, you’re here? Finished your work?”

“I, I did…!”

That was a lie. Luna hadn’t managed to do any work during her shift.

With such a big event ahead, it was impossible to focus on work.

She just opened and closed the closet in one corner of the lab over and over again.

“Shall we go then?”

“Yes!”

Luna responded, fidgeting with her clothes.

The dress she was wearing had been chosen after much deliberation during work hours.

It was a dress saved for an important occasion, and wearing it felt somewhat

uncomfortable since she hadn't worn it many times before.

Of course, the current situation added to this discomfort.

She had to confess to Rudy today.

That's why she kept fidgeting with her dress, wanting to look as pretty as possible.

"Here we are."

Lost in thought and adjusting her dress, they arrived at the restaurant Rudy had mentioned.

"This place…"

It was one of the most renowned restaurants in the Empire for its delicious food.

It was very famous, highly praised by high-ranking nobles.

"This place is incredibly expensive, right? And hard to book…"

"It's fine. I've already made the reservation, and money is not a problem."

"But still…"

Rudy smiled and pushed Luna's back gently.

"Let's go in. We're going to miss our reservation time."

"Uh, okay…"

Pushed by Rudy, Luna entered the restaurant.

"Wow…"

Luna exclaimed in awe.

The furniture inside seemed to be made of gold, shining brightly, and the soup and salad laid out were too beautiful to eat.

“Can we really eat this? It looks too precious to touch.”

Rudy playfully messed up the food on his plate and took a bite.

“Wow, this is so delicious.”

Watching Rudy, Luna swallowed her saliva.

Though the food was beautifully decorated, it was incredibly appetizing.

Luna closed her eyes tight and first touched the soup.

“…!”

The perfect temperature, the umami swirling in her mouth, and the subtle aroma of mushrooms spreading gently.

The small pieces of meat on top of the soup doubled its flavor.

After one spoonful, Luna began to devour the soup eagerly.

Rudy asked Luna.

“Is it good?”

“Mhm!”

Luna nodded vigorously, her mouth full of food.

“We’ll prepare the next course.”

As soon as they finished their bowls, the courses continued to arrive one after another.

“Mmm~~~!”

Luna ate with a blissful expression, indicating it was delicious, and Rudy smiled happily watching her.

Thus, they finished their meal.

“Did you enjoy the meal?”

“Yeah, I’m full…”

Luna smiled happily, rubbing her stomach.

Then, Luna realized why she was here and what she had to do.

“Ah…”

She had intended to at least mention marriage during the meal.

But the meal was already over.

She had been so engrossed in the food that time just flew by.

‘What an idiot!’

Luna inwardly scolded herself, looking upset.

Seeing Luna’s troubled expression, Rudy tilted his head.

“Luna, is something wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing…”

Seeing her satisfied with the meal but then suddenly distressed was puzzling.

“Ha. Ha. Rudy, isn’t the weather nice?”

It was odd.

Talking about the weather in a room without a single window.

And speaking in such a mechanically stiff manner made it clear.

Why is she acting like this…

Rudy slipped his hand into his pocket, fidgeting with the ring he had prepared earlier.

‘Maybe today’s not the day…”‘

Luna didn’t seem to be in good condition, and attempting anything now wouldn’t yield any good results.

“Ha. Ha.”

Luna awkwardly laughed, possibly aware of Rudy’s thoughts.

‘Now that we’ve finished eating… ‘

Rudy looked at Luna’s empty plate and started getting ready to leave.

“Shall we go now?”

“Go? Where to?”

“Home. We’ve finished eating, and it’s awkward just sitting here.”

“Oh, no!”

Luna abruptly stood up from her seat.

Rudy looked at her, puzzled.

Realizing her own reaction, Luna quickly tried to cover it up.

“Like Rudy said, it’s awkward just sitting here… Let’s, let’s go somewhere else. Yeah! Somewhere else!”

“Somewhere else?”

Rudy had a place in mind for after dinner.

He had planned to give her the ring there, but since he intended to give it to her on another day, they couldn’t go to that planned place now.

After a moment of thought, Rudy smiled at Luna.

“How about we take a walk outside?”

After settling the bill, Luna and Rudy stepped outside.

They walked the streets in silence.

Even though it was evening and the streets were dark, the moonlight was bright enough to walk without any problems.

During their walk, both of them were lost in their thoughts.

'What to do. What to do.'

Luna wanted to create a favorable situation, but in these circumstances, finding a good solution seemed impossible.

Rudy looked at her with a concerned face.

'…Why is Luna acting like this.'

Luna fidgeted with an anxious expression.

She neither looked at him directly nor opened her mouth to speak.

Rudy couldn't understand the situation.

He hadn't spread any rumors about marrying someone else, so he couldn't imagine that Luna had heard such news.

'We're walking because Luna wanted to… '

It seemed best to send Luna home.

She looked anxious for some reason.

"Luna?"

"Uh, yes!"

"The wind's getting chilly, should we start heading back?"

"Go back? Why? Is something wrong?"

“No, it’s not that…”

That’s when Luna thought.

‘Rudy wants to go home… ‘

Would Yuni, Rie, and Astina be waiting at home?

Maybe they had already enjoyed their meal together.

Would Rudy end up eating twice? Misunderstandings led to more misunderstandings, and Luna became more confused.

And then.

“Luna?”

“Ugh… Mmph…”

She started to tear up.

“Lu, Luna. Why…”

“Wahh!!!”

Overwhelmed by her emotions, Luna burst into tears.

The situation was already too sad, and the thought of Rudy starting a married life without her was unbearably painful.

“Rudy! Don’t leave me behind!”

Luna, with tears streaming down her face, rushed towards Rudy.

“Uh, what?”

Rudy was taken aback by the situation and looked at Luna, who had suddenly thrown herself into his arms.

Although he wasn’t sure what had happened, he hugged Luna and patted her back.

“Sob… Sniff…”

“It’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay…”

As he comforted her, Luna gradually stopped crying.

“Shall we sit down for a bit?”

Rudy led the tear-streaked Luna to a bench and sat her down, then crouched in front of her.

“What happened today? You’ve been anxious the whole time.”

“No, it’s not… Sob. It wasn’t anything…”

“Really? Can you tell me why you cried then?”

Luna looked at Rudy, who was gazing at her with genuine concern.

After bursting into tears like that, she couldn’t just beat around the bush.

“…I heard a rumor.”

Luna quietly began to explain.

Why she cried.

What she had heard.

“Already a rumor…”

After hearing the whole story, Rudy sighed.

“So, sorry… It’s all my fault…”

At that, Rudy shook his head and spoke firmly.

“No, it’s not your fault, Luna. If anything, it’s mine. I should have been aware of such rumors spreading.”

Understanding the whole situation made Rudy realize why Luna had acted that way.

Then, there was no reason to postpone things any further.

Rudy reached into his pocket, pulling out a small ring.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been too late.”

“This is…”

“I wanted to say it in a better place, at a better time. But it seems too late now, so I’ll give it to you now.”

Rudy gently took Luna’s hand.

“Can I really accept this? If you’re doing this just because I cried…”

“Do you think I’d propose just because you cried?”

“I’m a crybaby… I’m not as bold as Rie or Astina…”

“That’s you, Luna. And I like you just the way you are.”

“My face is a mess right now…”

Rudy smiled, lifting his hand to wipe away her tears.

“A mess? You’re only beautiful.”

At those words, Luna pressed her lips tightly together.

“Sob…”

“Why are you trying to cry again?”

As he spoke, Rudy slipped the ring onto Luna’s finger.

And said,

“I love you.”

Hearing those words, Luna swallowed the tears that threatened to come out again.

And responded,

“I, I love you too.”

It was a confession full of twists and turns.

Yet, the outcome was positive, and so Rudy’s confession operation came to an end.

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“Ahem.”

The officiant, Cromwell, cleared his throat and called Rudy forward.

“Groom, Rudy Astria.”

“Yes.”

“Do you vow to love your brides forever?”

“Yes, I will love them.”

Cromwell turned his head to look at the brides standing beside him.

“Bride, Rie Von Ristonia.”

“…Yes.”

“Bride, Yuni Von Ristonia.”

“Yes~.”

“Bride, Astina Persia.”

“Yes.”

“Bride, Luna Railer.”

“Yes, yes!”

Cromwell called out to all the brides and let out a chuckle.

It felt somewhat like sending off sons and daughters in marriage.

Immersed in sentiment, Cromwell spoke.

“Do you vow to love Rudy Astria forever?”

Everyone in white wedding dresses looked at Rudy beside them.

At their husband Rudy Astria, clad in a black suit…

Rudy smiled at everyone and responded to the officiant’s question.

““Yes, we will love him forever.””

“Then I declare in this ceremony that all of you are now united in marriage.”

Applause and cheers erupted in the wedding hall following Cromwell’s declaration.

However, those standing in front didn’t hear such sounds.

They only had eyes for each other.

Rudy smiled at them all and spoke again.

“I will love you forever.”

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[raei: And that’s it guys! My first ever novel translation complete! Thanks for everyone that stayed all the way. I unfortunately stopped reading comments halfway through because I just got so busy. Would probably help if I made something that just sent all new comments to me rather than having to go to chapter page each time. Another thing in my to do list I guess.

I also have a novel completing in 2 days and another in a month… I’ve been translating for a year now so it’s nice to have some completed novels under my belt.

I'm picking up some new novels I'll be releasing with the completion of this and my second novel so check them out if you're interested! One is a harem as well.

I hope you enjoyed the novel, the tl quality has come a long way… I wonder if anyone remembers the dumb mistakes I made in the first bunch of chaps… and then the huge confusion over Jefrin's gender…

Anyways, Raei out! (￣ー￣)ゞ]

PDF by: traitorAIZEN